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# Which Sunscreen Is Right For You?

## *Learn How To Block Most Dangerous Rays*

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Colin Gawel never thought seriously about sunscreen until last year, when his doctor found a cancerous growth on his face.

"I had this spot on my nose for maybe eight months before that. Like anyone, I just blew it off, waiting for it to go away. I thought maybe my son had scratched me," said Gawel, 37, a musician and coffee shop owner in Columbus, Ohio.

### My Family

Cost Of A Tan | Skin Self-Exams

One day, the spot started to bleed. Gawel's wife insisted he go to the doctor, who diagnosed it as basal cell carcinoma, the most common type of cancer.

A dermatologist removed the growth, which was larger than expected, and pulled skin across the incision to mask the damage. Gawel ended up with 50 stitches.

"I looked like Rocky Balboa," he joked. "I told everyone that I'm beautiful on the inside."

He said he was surprised he got skin cancer because he isn't outdoors a lot. As a child, however, he had a newspaper route from fourth grade until high school.

"I was in the afternoon sun every single day, and I never wore sunscreen," Gawel said.

Since he was diagnosed, Gawel and his wife are more careful about sun exposure, especially with their 3-year-old son.

"That kid doesn't go outside without wearing sunscreen," Gawel said.

But with many products touting their sun-protection factor -- or SPF -- how can you tell what will really work for you and your family?

### Finding The Right Product

"What many people do not know is that the SPF of a sunscreen is only a measure of its UVB protection. Proper sunscreen must take into consideration the UVA coverage as well," said Dr. Peter Kopelson, a dermatologist and owner of the Kopelson Clinic in Beverly Hills, Calif.

He said consumers should look for sunscreen that contains one of the following UVA blockers: avobenzone (also called Parsol 1789), mexoryl, titanium dioxide or zinc oxide.

"I like titanium and zinc oxide because they filter UVA and UVB and act instantly. The downside is that they can be opaque, and people don't like their appearance," said Dr. Kenneth Beer, a dermatologist in West Palm Beach, Fla., and author of "Palm Beach Perfect Skin."

Avobenzone can be irritating to the skin and eyes, so people with sensitive skin should carefully read the product's list of ingredients, said Dr. Omeed Memar, medical director at the Academic Dermatology and Skin Cancer Institute in Chicago.

Of all the UVA blockers, Mexoryl is the newest compound that is approved by the Food and Drug Administration, Memar said. It is available in the United States by L'Oreal with an SPF 20; European products with mexoryl have much higher SPFs.

Gawel has been using a Lubriderm lotion with SPF 15, but he's thinking of switching brands after another skin cancer patient recommended Blue Lizard Australian Sunscreen SPF 30, which is a little more expensive but ranks highly in online consumer reviews.

"Blue Lizard is a great product, especially ideal for those with sensitive skin," Memar said. "It contains zinc oxide, which is a physical block to the sun's harmful rays and is known to be less irritating to the skin."

## **Watch The SPF**

For people who make it outside for a small amount of time, a daily-wear product with SPF 30 is fine, Beer said.

He suggested that people who work outdoors or play outside for long amounts of time use a product with SPF 50 and UVA protection and be sure to apply it to any skin that will be exposed to the sun, including the back, arms, legs and neck.

Memar said his favorite sunscreen is Citrix SPF 30, which is a combination of zinc oxide, avobenzone, green tea extract and coenzyme Q-10.

"Green tea extract is being shown to protect skin from skin cancer formation, and coenzyme Q-10 is one of the first antioxidants depleted after sun exposure, and replenishing the skin with it can give added protection," Memar said.

## **Find What Works For You**

Beer said sunscreen products from Clinique, Neutrogena, Solbar, Anthelios, Minusol and SkinCeuticals are wonderful.

He said the real issue is finding one you will use daily, and that may take some experimenting.

"If a product is great but is not applied because it is too greasy or the person gets a rash from it, it is irrelevant for that individual. My recommendation for consumers is to try a few brands and see which one they like," Beer said.

Mark Nagel, a 45-year-old skin cancer survivor in Chicago, suffered allergic reactions to several sunscreens before his doctor recommended Neutrogena. Now he uses Neutrogena SPF 30.

"My doctor likes (SPF) 45 to 50, but to me it feels like clown makeup," Nagel said.

Skin cancer survivor Kelly Breen, 58, of Overland Park, Kan., said she uses a L'Oreal face moisturizer with SPF 15 because it's not too heavy and it goes on smoothly, and it can be worn alone or under makeup.

"It's a nice lotion. I'm very happy with it," Breen said.

## When To Slather

Whatever product you choose, be sure to apply it 20 to 30 minutes prior to being in the sun, because the chemical ingredients need time to activate. And once you're outside, reapply sunscreen on a regular basis.

"When you are in direct sun, you must reapply every two hours. However, if you are sweating or swimming, then you need to reapply on a more frequent basis," Memar said.

And don't be stingy with the sunscreen.

"More is better, so slather it on," Beer said.

### Other Links:

- [Special Cancer Section](#)
- [More Sun Safety Tips](#)
- [Skin Health Primer](#)

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