



Frequently asked questions

1. What should I look for in sunscreen?

Choose broad-spectrum products containing zinc oxide, titanium dioxide or avobenzone with a SPF of 30 or higher. Reapply every 90 minutes.

2. What clothes are better for sun protection?

Choose tight weaves, thick fabrics and dark colors. Clothes made with UV protection are available. These products should have a UPF (ultraviolet protection factor) of 30 or higher. You may also choose to wash UV protection into your clothes. RIT® makes a product called SunGuard™, which you wash in to your laundry to add UPF 30 to fabrics.

3. Why does AZ have such high skin cancer incidence?

Arizona is close to the sun (high altitude), close to the equator (low latitude), and has a warm climate all year. High altitude and low latitude mean less atmospheric protection from damaging sun rays (UV radiation). For example, if you're in the mountains, you can have 50% greater UV exposure than if you're at sea level. Plus, a warmer climate means more time spent outside YEAR ROUND with less clothing covering your skin.

4. What is the difference between UVA & UVB?

Ultraviolet A rays (UVA) are long-wave rays and ultraviolet B (UVB) are short-wave rays. Both are very bad for your skin. Because UVB rays are shorter than UVA rays, much of the skin damage done by them happens in the skin's surface layers. UVB rays are the main cause of sunburn. Because UVA rays are longer, they penetrate through clothing and glass and deep into the skin causing long-term damage such as wrinkles, age spots and sagging skin. There is evidence that both UVA and UVB cause skin cancer.

5. Can I get a sunburn on a cloudy day?

YES! 70% to 80% of UV radiation can pass through thin clouds. On cloudy days, your skin might feel cooler, and because of this it is less likely you will notice your skin getting burned. As a result, you may spend more time outside unprotected, thus doing more damage to your skin than you would on a sunny day. Wear sunscreen everyday whether it's cloudy or not.

6. What is SPF?

SPF stands for “sun protection factor” and refers only to protection from UVB radiation. A SPF number tells you how much longer you can stay in the sun without burning while wearing sunscreen than if you were not wearing sunscreen. If your skin usually burns in 10 minutes without any type of sun protection, then an SPF of 15 means that you can stay in the sun 15 times longer ($10 \times 15 = 150$ minutes) before you begin to burn. However, in order to get that full protection time from the sunscreen, you **MUST** generously apply sunscreen 20-30 minutes before going outside and reapply every 90 minutes. Sunscreen can wear off with wind, sweat, and exposure to water. Even “water-resistant” products must be reapplied. Remember: wearing a higher SPF product should not be considered a reason to stay in the sun longer. Limit your exposure to too much sun as much as possible.

7. Do I have to worry about a vitamin D deficiency if I use sunscreen?

It takes very little sun exposure for your body to make vitamin D. If you’re worried about getting enough vitamin D, visit your healthcare provider to have your levels tested. You may also want to eat foods rich in vitamin D (fatty fish, fortified milk) or take a supplement.

8. Do I need to use sunscreen if I'm not going to be in the sun for a long time?

Even if you do not plan to be out in the sun a lot during the day, incidental UV exposure such as a short walk or drive time to work adds up! The more you are protected the better off your skin will be. Make sunscreen use part of your everyday routine. Try putting it on after you brush your teeth every morning.

9. What should I do about my baby on sunny days? Does a stroller cover protect?

Keep infants under 6 months of age out of the sun, even on cloudy days. Sunscreen can be used on babies older than 6 months, but covering them up with long-sleeves, pants, wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses is the best protection. A stroller cover can protect some from the sun, but damaging sun rays are bouncing off other surfaces and getting to your baby’s skin even in the shade. Special stroller shades are available which have full protection from the sun.

10. Sunscreen irritates my skin. What should I do?

Try a product made for sensitive skin or one made for babies. These products generally contain less harsh chemicals. Choose products with only zinc oxide or titanium dioxide listed as active ingredients. These are less likely to irritate your skin.

11. Are tanning beds safer than lying in the sun?

Absolutely not!! Using tanning beds and tanning under the sun are both very damaging to the skin. A tan is the skin’s reaction to the sun’s damaging UV rays. Avoid a tan of any kind!