

## Fact Sheet

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### **SUNSCREEN**

Sunscreen is a chemical agent that provides either a physical blocker or chemical filter from the sun's ultraviolet radiation (UVR).

#### **Physical blockers**

Sunscreens containing physical blockers which often create a visible layer of sunscreen on skin. Typical ingredients are titanium dioxide and zinc oxide, which work in two ways:

1. Reflects the UVR as it reaches the skin.
2. Absorbs some UVR at a specific wavelength and converts it into heat energy.

#### **Chemical filters**

Chemical filters work by absorbing the UVR as it reaches your skin, and then counteracts the UVR to reduce damage.

#### **Why should we use sunscreen?**

In conjunction with other SunSmart behaviours, sunscreen helps to protect skin from harmful UVR and therefore reduce the risk of developing skin cancer and skin damage, including premature ageing and solar keratoses.

#### **How do I apply sunscreen?**

Sunscreen needs to be applied to clean, dry skin at least 20 minutes before going outside. This gives the protective elements in sunscreen time to bond to skin. Sunscreen should be applied liberally (approximately one teaspoon per limb) every two hours, or more frequently if you are sweating, swimming or it has been wiped or rubbed off.

Because all everybody's skin is unique, some people's skin may react differently to the chemicals present in sunscreen. Because of this, the level of protection provided by sunscreen can vary due to a number of factors including genetics, current skin damage and your skin type. It is for this reason that sunscreen should not be regarded as the sole form of sun protection; it should be the last line of defence against the sun's harmful UV rays.

*It is important to keep a thin film of sunscreen on your skin to maximise its effectiveness, so resist the temptation to rub it all in.*

#### **What does SPF mean?**

SPF stands for 'Sun Protection Factor'. It is a measure of the level of protection against the sun that a sunscreen provides. Technically, the SPF is the ratio of the UVR dose that is required to cause reddening of the skin (sunburn). The higher the SPF, the better the protection from UVR. The maximum SPF of sunscreen sold in Australia currently is 30+.

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### Which sunscreen should I use?

Cancer Council Queensland recommends use of the highest protection available SPF 30+ water resistant, broad spectrum sunscreen.

Price is not a good indicator regarding the suitability of a sunscreen product. To ensure your sunscreen will offer you the greatest protection from harmful **UVA and UVB** radiation, always use a broad spectrum SPF30+ water resistant sunscreen.

### Understanding the difference between SPF 15 and SPF 30+

The Australian/New Zealand Standards (AS/NZ2606:1997) allowed the level of SPF labels of sunscreens sold in Australia to be raised from SPF15+ to SPF 30+. This change was introduced to encourage international consistency. Australians should be aware that raising the SPF level does not indicate double protection. A sunscreen with an SPF 30+ rating only provides a small percentage increase in the amount of protection given by an SPF15+. The guidelines for applying sunscreen do not change with the SPF rating.

Using an SPF30+ sunscreen means you are protected from approximately 96.7 per cent of UVR and getting a very good level of protection.

### When choosing a sunscreen look for the following:

- Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30+.
- Broad spectrum (protects against UVA and UVB).
- Water resistant.

### Water resistant sunscreen

Water resistant sunscreen contains ingredients to help continue to protect your skin when immersed in water. To ensure ongoing protection from these sunscreens, it is vital to reapply after swimming or perspiring, i.e. during sporting activities, outdoor work sites, swimming or gardening.

It is also important not to rely on the sunscreen to protect your skin for extended periods of time, or to deliberately increase your amount of time in the sun because you have applied sunscreen. If you need to spend extended periods of time in the sun, always adopt other SunSmart behaviours including wearing sun protective clothing/swimwear and hats and avoiding outdoor activities between 10am – 3pm.

### Do sunscreens have a 'used by' date?

Yes! Over time chemical components contained in sunscreen will break down, reducing the protection level indicated on the label. To maximise the life of your sunscreen (approximately three years), it is essential to store sunscreen in a cool place (below 30°C) and regularly check the expiry date.

### Cosmetics containing sunscreen

Many varieties of make-up and cosmetic products include an SPF rating on the label. This means that chemicals have been added to the base products to provide sun protection. These products are required to undergo the same strict testing procedures as any sunscreen product; however it is important to note that some may not be broad spectrum or water resistant. In addition, remember that make-up and cosmetics are rarely reapplied every two hours; therefore it is important to remember to reapply sunscreen.

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### Sunscreen and babies

Infants, particularly under the age of two years, should be kept out of the sun as much as possible and should always be protected from any sun exposure by using a number of SunSmart behaviours including protective clothing, hats, and shade.

When these forms of sun protection are not adequate, sunscreen can be used. Sunscreen can be applied to the small areas of the skin which are not covered by clothing such as the face and back of the hands and neck.

There is no evidence to suggest that the use of sunscreen on infants and children is harmful to their skin or has any adverse long-term side effects. If parents are concerned that their child may be sensitive or allergic to some ingredients in sunscreen; consider trialling a toddler or sensitive skin formula. These formulas often have added moisturisers and less fragrance or other ingredients responsible for skin irritations.

Always try new sunscreen on a small area of skin first to make sure there is no reaction. If your child does have a reaction, try using another variety of sunscreen with a different active ingredient.

Remember sunscreen should be used as an adjunct to other forms of sun protection, not the sole form of sun protection.

### Be SunSmart!

It is very important to note that sunscreens are recommended as an addition to the other SunSmart strategies for adequate sun protection.



**Protect yourself in five ways from skin cancer**

For the best sun protection from the sun, ALWAYS:

1. **Slip on protective clothing.**
2. **Slop on SPF 30+ sunscreen. Reapply every two hours.**
3. **Slap on a broad-brimmed hat.**
4. **Seek shade and limit exposure between 10am and 3pm.**
5. **Slide on wrap-around sunglasses.**