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Sun Protection

There is a general public awareness that sun exposure increases your risk for developing skin cancer. Worldwide, there has been an increase in skin cancer especially among young adults over recent years. Prevention of sun damage is dependent upon reducing your overall exposure to sunlight on a year round basis because sun damage is cumulative. Over the years, total time in the sun is reflected by wrinkles, irregular pigmentation, premature aging and with enough exposure, skin cancer.

With the vast number of sunscreens on the market, it is important to understand several key factors.

Sunscreens and Sunblocks are not the same. Sunscreens are considered chemical barriers that reduce the amount of radiation that penetrates the skin. Many sunscreens only protect against UVB radiation, not UVA radiation. Most sunscreens contain avobenzone, oxybenzone, or PABA. Sunblocks are considered physical, not chemical, barriers that reflect both UVA and UVB. Sunblocks usually contain zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. Many people with sensitive skin choose sunblocks because they are less irritating on the skin.

UVA vs UVB radiation is an important concept to understand. UVA radiation penetrates the skin deeper than UVB rays. For this reason it causes skin cancer, wrinkling, and premature aging. UVB rays most often cause sunburns by damaging the epidermis which also leads to an increased risk of skin cancer and premature aging. Sunblocks protect from UVA and UVB while older sunscreens may only protect from UVB. Many newer "broad spectrum" sunscreens protect against both UVA and UVB by combining ingredients from both sunscreens and sunblocks.

SPF, also known as the sun protection factor, is a measure of protection against only UVB radiation. An SPF of 15 will delay a sunburn 15 times longer than if using no protection at all.

It is important to choose sun protection with an SPF of at least 30, that is water resistant (if needed for prolonged sweating or exposure to water), and that has broad spectrum coverage for UVA and UVB. A few general recommendations include:

Aveeno Baby Sunblock lotion SPF 45
Banana Boat Sport Ultra SPF 30
Bull Frog Superblock Sunblock Lotion SPF 45
Coppertone Waterbabies SPF 50
Neutrogena Sunblock with Helioplex SPF 55
Blue Lizard Australian SPF 30
Neutrogena Sunblock lotion for sensitive skin SPF 30
Aveeno daily facial moisturizer SPF 15 - 55 (for acne prone skin)
Cetaphil daily facial moisturizer SPF 15 (for acne prone skin)

Reducing your lifetime risk for skin cancer and premature aging should include a regimen of avoiding sunbathing, limiting time in the sun between 10am-4pm, wearing protective clothing including sunglasses and broad-rimmed hats, and using broad spectrum sunscreens or sunblocks on a regular basis.