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## SO YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE DOING THE RIGHT THING SLATHERING ON THE SUNSCREEN . . .

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**MAYBE NOT-** It turns out that many of the sunscreens we have used all these years have been unhelpful, and some possibly harmful. Data collected over the last 15 to 20 years about sunscreen efficacy is now available to the FDA who is reviewing it. It turns out some common sunscreens which claim to protect actually only block UVB rays, when we really need both UVA and UVB protection. Some sunscreens' effectiveness wanes far earlier than claimed. Even more troubling were some Australian studies which showed higher rates of melanoma skin cancer in sunscreen users. As to why exactly, it isn't known yet if it's that sunscreen users stay out longer in the more intense light hours than they should, if the sunscreen itself is causing free radicals to be released in the skin's DNA, or if the anti-inflammatory properties of sunscreen mask sunburn symptoms to the point where a person doesn't recognize that they've had enough.

**SO WHICH PRODUCTS/CHEMICALS SHOULD I AVOID?** There may be further recommendations on this soon, so stay tuned, but to start with avoid: oxybenzone, 4-MBC, "retinol" products which contain Vitamin A (retinyl palmitate), octinoxate, and padimate. Avoid aerosolized/spray-on (nano-sprays) or powdered products (unknown if the amount of inhaled particle may be damaging to lungs).

**WHICH PRODUCTS SHOULD I LOOK FOR?** The term "SPF" only rates UVB, so look for products which list UVA and UVB protection. The terms "broad-spectrum" or "blocks all harmful rays" are unregulated, so you can't trust them. Get a SPF of 30 or greater, and reapply every 2 hours. SPF 50 only blocks 1.3 % more harmful rays than SPF 30, so if it's a big difference in cost, SPF 30 will work. Look for the term "very water resistant"- this means the block will last 80 minutes in water. The term "waterproof" is unregulated and may not mean much. The chemical components of sunscreen that appear to be safe and efficacious include titanium dioxide, zinc oxide, photo-stabilized oxybenzone, and Mexoryl.

**WHICH BRANDS CONTAIN THE RIGHT CHEMICALS AND WHERE CAN I FIND THEM?** You'll need to read the labels carefully. Currently, it's a bit hard to find the

good stuff. Local sporting goods stores seem to have a better selection of the good sunscreens than the grocery/drug stores. The Good Food Store also carries a couple of brands of the better sunscreens for kids. Ask the manager of your local grocery/drug store to start carrying the better products; consumer pressure is usually what it takes. Examples of brands which contain safer/more efficacious ingredients:

Alba Botanical  
 Badger  
 Blue Lizard  
 Beyond Costal  
 Bullfrog  
 California Baby  
 Johnson and Johnson Baby Sunscreen  
 LaRoche- Posay- Anthelios



**WHAT SHOULD I DO?** No sunscreen in the world will protect you like staying out of the sun during the most intense hours (10 AM to 2 PM), seeking shade, wearing light clothing, hats, and keeping your skin covered. For exposed skin, use a good sunscreen and reapply every 2 hours. Newer swimsuits with long sleeves and longer shorts are better than bare skin; the less exposed skin the better. We all need some direct sun to keep our Vitamin D levels healthy, but this can be accomplished with just 10 minutes of direct sun 3-4 times per week.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** The Environmental Working Group has a very user-friendly website with much more. [www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)

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