



HEALTH WATCH: What's Hot in Sun Protection?

SPF. UVA. UVB. It's like swimming through alphabet soup when it comes to understanding sun protection. Let's step back and take a look at what's important and what the FDA (oh no, another acronym) is doing to make it easier to protect yourself from sun damage. Let's start with some definitions.

SPF = Sun Protection Factor

All sunscreens are currently tested according to a standard SPF test, which measures UVB protection.

UVB = Ultraviolet "B" radiation

Causes sunburn.

UVA = Ultraviolet "A" radiation

Can lead to skin cancer and premature skin aging.

FDA = Food and Drug Administration

Regulates health and pharmaceutical products, among other things.

You've probably also heard the term "broad spectrum" protection. This refers to sunscreens that provide both UVA and UVB protection, a good thing. Unfortunately, today's sunscreens are only tested for UVB levels. The higher the SPF the more exposure you can have to UVB rays before getting a sunburn. The SPF says nothing about the level of UVA protection.

Thanks to the FDA, starting next summer, over-the-counter sunscreens will be required to pass a new broad spectrum test, demonstrating that they provide both UVA and UVB protection in equal proportion. This means that sunscreens will advertise their "broad spectrum SPF" rating, helping us better regulate our risk of sunburn, skin cancer and premature aging of skin.

Until then, the FDA and the doctors at Northwest Natural Health encourage you to continue practicing sun safety.

- Use a broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF value of at

least 15 (some say 30).

- Limit time in the sun, especially between the hours of 10 AM and 2 PM when the sun's rays are the strongest.
- Wear clothing to cover sun-exposed skin (long-sleeved shirts, pants, sunglasses, and broad-brimmed hats) when possible.
- Use a water resistant sunscreen if swimming or sweating.
- Reapply sunscreen at least every 2 hours, even if it is labeled "water resistant." No sunscreen is "waterproof" and water resistant sunscreens need to be reapplied more often after swimming or sweating, according to the directions on the label.

So, if the sun ever comes out and stays out, in the Northwest, follow this memory aid from the American Cancer Society. When in the sun, remember to **Slip, Slop, Slap** and **Wrap**... slip on a shirt, slop on sunscreen, slap on a hat and wrap on some sunglasses. ❖