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Smarter Sunscreen

This summer, you'll apply more than a gallon of sunscreen. Here's how to choose a brand without the harmful chemicals.

by MELAINA JUNTTI

COVERING YOUR BODY with sunscreen every day — and about three times that for days at the beach — is a good habit. But all that lotion soaking into your pores may also carry harmful ingredients. Oxybenzone, the most common UV-absorbing chemical, is approved by the Food and Drug Administration, but some experts question its safety. Early studies have linked it to changes in hormone levels, and in high-enough quantities, it may pose cancer risks. More likely, oxybenzone, along with avobenzone (another anti-UV ingredient), can irritate skin or cause an allergic reaction, says Dr. Paul Jarrod

GROOMING

Frank, a dermatologist in New York City. “And the higher the SPF, the higher the concentration of chemicals.” While the studies of these risky ingredients are preliminary, you might as well avoid them. There are plenty of effective plant- and mineral-based sunscreens with active ingredients that sit safely atop the skin, rather than being absorbed into the bloodstream — the only disadvantage is they sometimes leave a white residue. Experts recommend an SPF of 30 — any higher and the effectiveness levels out. Seek out ingredients like zinc oxide and titanium dioxide or try one of the six quality sunscreens we tested.

CHEMICAL-FREE PROTECTION

These six sunscreens offer broad-spectrum protection without the toxins.

1. Beyond Coastal Natural Sunscreen Broad Spectrum SPF 30
Aloe vera and algae extract hydrate skin in this water-resistant sunscreen. It covers without leaving the white residue common with mineral-based sunscreens.
\$12; beyondcoastal.com

2. Thinksport SPF 50+ Sunscreen
Thinksport stays put through intense workouts and doesn't itch after sweating. It leaves a slight white hue but is great for running or riding.
\$16; gothinksport.com

3. Alba Botanica Very Emollient Sunscreen Mineral Protection Aloe Vanilla
This SPF 30 lotion is pasty out of the bottle, but it smooths out well on the skin. Water-resistant Alba leaves hands soft and has a slight, fresh scent.
\$11; albabotanica.com

4. Badger Broad Spectrum SPF 30 with Aloe Vera
Thanks to aloe vera and other botanicals, this one's perfect for sensitive skin. Great for the whole body, it rubs onto hairy arms and legs without clumping.
\$18; badgerbalm.com

5. Sunology Sport Stick
The SPF 35 stick glides on streak-free and dry, making it perfect for applying around the hairline, ears, nose, and neck.
\$11; sunology.com

6. Elemental Herbs Sunscreen Sport SPF 30+
This silky lotion is the most transparent of the bunch. Shea butter and plant oils soften skin, but it's not sweat- or water-resistant. Best for lounging.
\$16; elementalherbs.com

THE NEW RULES FOR SUNSCREEN

You may have noticed the deceptive advertising on sunscreen: Companies call their products “waterproof,” or promise “all-day protection” (both technically impossible), and boast ridiculously high SPFs, some claiming to block 100 percent of the sun. SPF, in fact, refers to duration of protection. Last December, the FDA began enforcing new labeling rules to ensure that the claims of sunscreen

manufacturers are legit. Here's what to look for on those labels — how to cut through bureaucratic jargon and buy the most effective sunscreen.

• **Buy sunscreen that is water- or sweat-resistant.** If a product has been shown to stay on in the water, the label will now specify that it's water-resistant to either 40 minutes or 80 minutes.

• **Always choose broad-spectrum sunscreen.** If a sunscreen is proven to protect against both UVA and UVB rays, it will now say so. If you apply it correctly, you'll be safeguarded against sunburn, wrinkles, and skin cancer.

• **Stay away from these two chemicals:** Oxybenzone and avobenzone. A Drug Facts panel will now display active ingredients like these, making them easier to avoid.