



Sunscreen Consumer Info

Sunscreens can be useful for protecting our skin from the sun's rays. However, they will not protect us completely from sun damage on their own. This is why we recommend using sunscreens together with shade or clothing to avoid getting caught out by sunburn.

What factor sunscreen should I buy?

The **SPF** is a measure of a sunscreen's protection against the UVB rays that cause sunburn and skin cancer. The higher the factor the more protection you get from burning. But higher factors provide little in the way of extra protection.

For example, an SPF15 sunscreen filters out 93% of UVB radiation, while an SPF30 sunscreen filters out 96%. **It is a common misconception that SPF30 offers double the protection of SPF15.**

No sunscreen - no matter how high the factor - can offer 100 per cent protection. And it will only provide the right amount of protection if it is applied generously and regularly. On average, people put on about a quarter as much sunscreen as they should - at these levels, research has shown that even a sunscreen with SPF80 only provides an actual SPF of 3.

It is impossible to compensate for too thin a layer by increasing the factor you use. Therefore, it is crucial that you apply sunscreen generously and regularly.

Organic and Inorganic sunscreens:

When it comes to sunscreens, the word "organic" does not have the same meaning that it does when used on food. It does not mean that a sunscreen is "natural" or contains fewer chemicals.

"Organic" is a technical term used in chemistry to describe molecules that contain carbon atoms. So the active ingredients in "organic sunscreens" contain carbon-based molecules, while the active ingredients in "inorganic sunscreens" do not - they are molecules like titanium dioxide.

Both types can help to prevent sunburn if used correctly - they just work in different ways.

- **Organic sunscreens**, also known as chemical sunscreens, work by absorbing ultraviolet rays from the sun.
- **Inorganic sunscreens**, also known as physical sunscreens or sun blocks, work by reflecting those rays.

Most available brands are now a mix of both types.

Some people find that inorganic sunscreens are harder to apply, and they end up putting less on. However, this is less of a problem for newer brands.

Inorganic sunscreens may be a better choice for children, because they are absorbed into the skin to a lesser extent and are less likely to trigger allergic reactions. Check for “titanium dioxide” or “zinc oxide” on the ingredients list.

However, **both types of sunscreen work** at protecting you from sunburn. The truth is that how you use sunscreen will have a far greater impact on reducing your risk of skin cancer.

Buying sunscreen:

We recommend buying sunscreens with:

- **Sun Protection Factor (SPF)** of at least 30 - the higher the factor of sunscreen the better
- **“broad-spectrum”** sunscreens with UVA/UVB Protection are a must for skin cancer prevention



- Also look out for expiry dates: check that they have **not gone past their expiry date** - most sunscreens have a shelf life of 2-3 years



- Make sure the sunscreen you use has the stamp: AS/ANZ STANDARD 2604:1998. This is one of the toughest standards to achieve in the world so make sure the sunscreen you use has it!



Sun Smart messages.....

- Avoid sunburn.



- Don't let your children get sun burnt. Sunburn in childhood is strongly linked to melanoma in later life.
- It is not the sun's heat that burns but ultraviolet radiation (UVR).
- Always plan for a Sun Smart day - Slip, Slop, Slap and Wrap.
- In the New Zealand context, sun protection is advisable during the peak UVR period, which is between the start of September and end of March, especially between 11 – 4pm
- Sunscreen should be the last line of defence – also wear protective clothing, a hat, sunglasses, keep in the shade whenever possible and avoid the peak UVR period between 11am and 4pm.
- There is no such thing as a 'safe' tan – any change in the colour of the skin is a sign that damage has taken place.
- All types of sunburn, whether serious or mild, can cause permanent and irreversible skin damage and lay the groundwork for skin cancer in later life.
- During the summer months, adequate vitamin D levels can potentially be achieved through sun exposure received during typical outdoor activities outside of peak UVI times.