



May brings the end of the school year and lots of opportunities for fun in the sun. But before you head outside, remember to apply and pack your sunscreen! Sun exposure is the number one cause of skin cancer, the most common cancer in the U.S. Choosing to use sunscreen can help you take action to reduce your risk for this mostly preventable cancer. If you're wondering where to start with sunscreen, following the basics of "choose it, use it, lose it" can help you protect your skin all year long.

Choose it

- **SPF 30+**- SPF, or sun protective factor, is a number that tells you how well a sunscreen protects you from sunburn. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher.¹ SPF 30 lets in 1/30 of ultraviolet (UV) rays, about 3%, which means it protects your skin from 97% of UV rays.¹⁻² No sunscreen is 100% protective, so consider wearing sun protective clothing and seeking shade when possible.¹
- **Broad spectrum**- Broad spectrum means your skin is protected from ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays.¹ Both types are naturally made by the sun and cause skin cancer.¹
- **Water resistant**- No sunscreen is waterproof or sweatproof, but choosing a sunscreen that is water resistant protects your skin for longer periods of time during the hot months.¹

Use it

- **Apply 1 oz**- Applying enough sunscreen is critical for preventing sunburn. For many adults, the standard recommendation is one ounce of sunscreen for your face, ears, neck, arms and legs.^{1,3} For a visual, one ounce of sunscreen is enough to fill a shot glass or the palm of your hand. Depending on the person and activity, you may need more sunscreen or less. The important thing is to cover all exposed skin!
- **15-20 minutes before**- There are two main types of sunscreen: chemical and mineral. The main difference is chemical sunscreens protect your skin by absorbing UV rays instead of physically blocking them. This means it takes about 20 minutes for this type of sunscreen to absorb into your skin so it can protect you from sunburn. Both types of sunscreen work and are safe to use. To read about the difference between the two, see link #4 in References.
- **Reapply every 2 hours (and after swimming or sweating)**- The ingredients in sunscreen that block UV rays break down when exposed to sun, so reapplying helps you stay protected.¹ Water and sweat can also wash off sunscreen and no sunscreen is water or sweat proof.

Lose it

- **Expired!**- Like many products, sunscreen expires. If you do not see an expiration date on your sunscreen, write the date you bought it on the bottle and throw it out after 3 years.¹
- **Heat warning**- Store your sunscreen in a cool, dry area. Heat can break down the ingredients that block UV rays which makes the sunscreen ineffective.¹ Throw out any sunscreen that has been stored in hot environments like attics, cars, or boats.

Sunscreen is a helpful tool for protecting yourself against skin cancer, but it's not the only one. To learn about more ways to protect your skin, check out [this resource](#) from the American Academy of Dermatology Association. If you notice any change in your skin, get it checked out by a board-certified dermatologist. Skin cancer screening saves lives! You can find information about the Wellstar MCG|GCC's team [here](#) or find another provider near you [here](#).

“The C Word” is a news brief of the Georgia Cancer Center at Augusta University. For cancer information visit our [website](#). To request presentations or other resources, contact Nyree Riley at nriley@augusta.edu | 706-721-8353 or Maryclaire Regan at mregan@augusta.edu | 706-721-4539. Virtual presentations can be arranged.

Sources:

1. <https://www.aad.org/media/stats-sunscreen>
2. <https://bananaboat.ca/pages/what-spf-is-right-for-me#:~:text=SPF%2030%20products%20are%20estimated,of%20the%20sun's%20burning%20rays>
3. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/sunscreen-and-your-morning-routine>
4. <https://www.mdanderson.org/cancerwise/is-mineral-sunscreen-better-than-chemical-sunscreen.h00-159540534.html>

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