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Sun-safe skin

With the summer sun finally shining we need to consider how best to protect ourselves from its potent rays.

Words by Holly Neill and Clare Neill

There is, perhaps surprisingly, much debate as to whether or not we should protect ourselves from the sun, and if so, then how? The most common way to combat the sun's harmful rays is to wear sun lotion. Although that may sound simple, the issue of sun care isn't as clear-cut as it at first seems.

Before thinking about sun protection, it helps to understand how the sun's rays affect the skin. There are two types of ultra violet (UV) ray that affect the skin. UVA rays cause DNA damage to the cells deep within the skin, which increases the risk of the development of

malignant melanomas and causes photo-ageing. UVA rays are particularly dangerous because the damage they do is invisible. As they do not cause the skin to burn we are often unaware of the damage being done. Conversely UVB rays are responsible for causing the skin to burn and thus the harm they do is tangible.

Consultant Dermatologist Dr Sally Ibbotson warns: "Sunlight is the main environmental risk factor for chronic photo-ageing and skin cancer". She believes that "it is essential to protect your skin". Nevertheless, how to protect your skin from these rays is not straight forward - you cannot just slap on the factor 20 and hope for the best. The first problem you face is the type of sunscreen you choose to wear.

Chemical versus mineral sun care
Sunscreen falls into two main categories: chemical and mineral. Chemical sunscreens are readily available and well publicised as leading beauty companies market them heavily. Chemical sunscreens tend to be very light and are quickly absorbed by the skin, however it has been proven that they can be problematic for

people with sensitive skin due to their chemical content.

Mineral sunscreen works quite differently to chemical types because it sits on the surface of the skin (rather than being absorbed by it) and acts as a physical barrier stopping the sun's harmful rays from penetrating the skin. Mineral UV protection contains mineral pigments, which are miniscule metal slats in the form of titanium oxide and zinc oxide that reflect UV rays away from the skin. Mineral sunscreen offers effective protection against UV damage without clogging the skin's pores or allowing chemicals to be absorbed by the skin and is suitable for those with sensitive skin. That said, the early mineral sunscreens were thicker, chalkier and often left a white film on the skin due to the mineral pigments present in the lotion. Fortunately, the latest versions are incredibly refined, feel as light and comfortable as chemical sunscreens and do not leave any white pigment on the skin.

Sun protection guidelines

Chemical sunscreens have for a long time been very popular because they are widely available and relatively cheap, and a vast sun protection industry has grown up with increasing concerns about skin cancer. However recent research suggests that they do not protect the skin very effectively: while they may be successful in stopping the skin from burning (if applied correctly and frequently), chemical sunscreens are not as effective at stopping UVA rays from penetrating the skin. Consequently terrible damage may be done to the skin without us knowing because the UVA rays do not cause the skin to burn, and consequently we are unaware of any invisible damage. A further concern of chemical sunscreens is that 60 per cent of what we put on our skin is absorbed into our bloodstream and with their mix of chemicals we are adding unnecessarily to the body's toxic load.

In addition the guidelines for the level of protection against the sun - the Sun Protection Factor (SPF) - are somewhat vague and misleading, perhaps unsurprising given that they were created by the skincare companies themselves, rather than by an unbiased commission or government body. It should work like this: if you apply a sunscreen with an SPF of 10, and your skin if left unprotected usually takes 14 minutes to burn then the sunscreen would supposedly give you 140 minutes of sun protection. However, the length

3 of the best natural sunscreens

- 1) Lavera Sun sensitive Family Sun Spray SPF15 Medium Protection - £14.50 (vegan)
- 2) Liz Earle Sun Shade 'SPF15 Body Protector - £17.25 (vegetarian)
- 3) Green People Sun Lotion SPF15 Medium Protection Sontan Accelerator - £16.30 (vegan)

Protect yourself

There are no simple answers on the sun care debate. The sun has significant benefits, both physical and emotional, but we must also be wary of the dangers of overexposure. So if you're heading out into the sun enjoy it responsibly and take some precautions:

- Know your skin type, and remember that even darker skin tones can burn and are still affected by UVA rays. Check out the British Skin Foundation for further information on skin types at www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk.
- If you're in direct sunlight for more than the amount of time that it takes for you to burn (this differs for everyone depending on their skin type – fair skin burns faster) either cover up your skin with loose fitting clothing or wear a mineral sunscreen.
- Try to avoid being in direct sunlight between 11am and 3pm as the sun is at its hottest.
- Remember to protect your head and hair too by wearing a sun hat.

of protection against the sun is also dependent on many other factors including skin type, the amount of sun cream used and what activities you are doing – all of which may shorten the length of time for which your skin is protected.

Change is afoot however. The EU and Colipia (the European Trade Association representing the interests of the cosmetic industry) have worked together to create new recommendations to improve the labelling of sun protection products. Sunscreen must now not only protect from sunburn from UVB rays, but also provide protection from UVA rays. Under the Commission's recommendation, claims such as 'sunblock' and '100 per cent protection' should no longer be used, and verbal descriptions such as 'low', 'medium' and 'high' should be used alongside traditional SPF values. Products should also display better information on protection against UVA radiation and should display a new UVA symbol of the letters inside a circle. However, as these are only voluntary guidelines not all companies have conformed yet. Lavera and Green People have been amongst the first companies to reformulate their products in line with the recommendations, and other companies are expected to follow suit by 2010.

The best after sun creams. Right: Aloe Pura Organic Aloe Vera After Sun Lotion. Below left: Dr Alkaitis Soothing Gel. Below right: Burt's Bees After Sun Soother



After sun

If despite taking care you manage to get burnt then there are plenty of products to help calm the situation. The Dr Alkaitis range is great for sun damaged skin as it contains anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory ingredients which help soothe and revitalise the skin. Any products containing aloe vera are also fantastic for remedying sun burn as the aloe vera plant is renowned for its cooling, moisturising and healing properties. Aloe Pura Organic Aloe Vera Gel is an excellent choice. For a chance to win one of ten fantastic sun safe kits including this product enter our competition at www.lifescapemag.com.

3 of the best after sun creams

1. Dr Alkaitis Soothing Gel - £35.25 (vegan)
2. Aloe Pura Organic Aloe Vera After Sun Lotion - £5.86 (vegetarian)
3. Burt's Bees After Sun Soother - £10.99 (vegetarian)

Win 1 of 10 Aloe Pura Safe summer sets!



Bring 'nature's wonder plant' into your holiday beauty regime for a totally soothing skincare experience this summer. The Aloe Pura Organic Aloe Vera range contains natural soothing aloe vera gel and is free from chemicals such as parabens, sodium laurel sulphate (SLS), artificial perfumes, colours and additives. The anti-inflammatory properties of aloe vera can relieve irritated skin, while botanical extracts jojoba oil, vitamin-rich avocado and chamomile leave the skin soft and hydrated. Each set contains a luxury beach towel, beach bag, Aloe Pura Aloe Vera Gel with Tea Tree, Aloe Pura Organic SPF 25 Sun Lotion, Aloe Pura Organic After-sun Lotion, Aloe Pura Lotion, Aloe Pura Aloe Vera Gel and postcards to send home. For further details on the range visit www.aloepura.co.uk. To enter the competition visit www.lifescapemag.com.

On the bright side

Although it may seem that the sun is a harmful force from which we need protection there is of course another side to the story. There is clear evidence to suggest that we do in fact need sun exposure, and no sun exposure can be as harmful as overexposure. Much of our body's vitamin D supply (approximately 75-90 per cent) is generated by UVB ray exposure, but with the application of sunscreen combined with our increasingly sedentary lifestyles many people are becoming vitamin D deficient, and suffering with related disease such as rickets, osteomalacia and osteoporosis. Having adequate vitamin D can reduce the risk of diabetes and of breast, colon, ovarian and prostate cancers. Additionally there are significant psychological benefits from sun exposure - where would we be without lazy afternoons sitting in parks or gardens enjoying the warmth of the sun? ■