

Sun Protection: Factors to consider

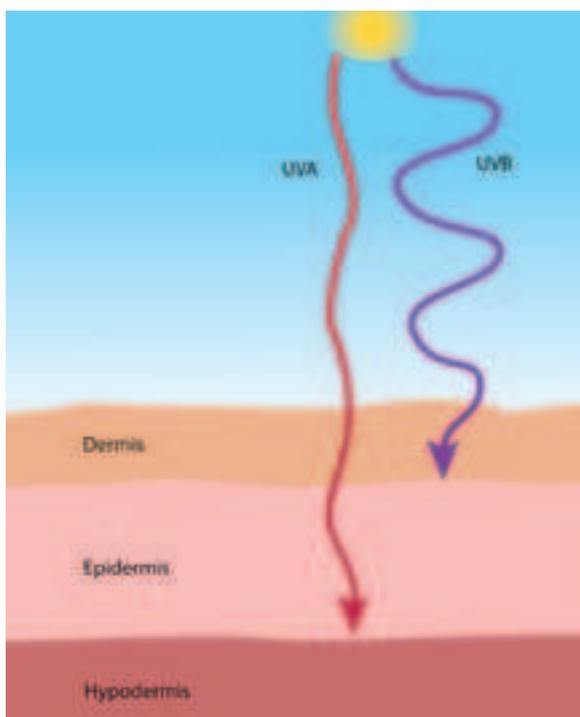
Sun protection is essential, but it is a massive industry with a huge marketing machine – and as evermore ‘wonder’ products are launched, it’s hard to know which to choose. Bombarded by technical-sounding terms and an array of SPFs, UVAs, UVBs and star ratings, I totally understand why so many people feel bamboozled.

On a more serious note, the lack of clear, easy-to-understand information means many people aren’t using the correct sunscreen and this is a concern. So, here is my attempt to shine a jargon-busting light on some of the most important factors when it comes to sunscreen.

UVA vs UVB

Ultraviolet (UVA and UVB) rays are both emitted by the sun and both harmful, but they attack the skin in different ways. UVB light damage is focused on the outer layer of the skin (dermis) while UVA penetrates deeper – into the epidermis and towards the hypodermis (see diagram).

Many products claim to offer UVA or UVB protection, but which should you choose? The answer to this one is simple: both. Always look for products that state ‘broad spectrum’ as these protect from both UVA and UVB light.



Which SPF?

SPF can be one of the most daunting decisions due to the myriad options available on shop shelves. From Factor 8 (why bother?) to Factor 50+, the options are overwhelming.

My advice is to always wear a minimum SPF30. This will block 97% of harmful UV rays and provide a high level of protection. This is also easily achievable.

Chemical vs physical

Many people aren’t even aware that sunscreen products fall into two clear categories: chemical and physical. As a rule, chemical sunscreens tend to be a thinner consistency, like the creams or lotions we wear every day, while physical protection is thicker.

The difference? Chemical sun products are absorbed and convert UV rays into less damaging wavelengths of light; physical sunscreens sit on top of the skin and remain visible, creating a ‘barrier’ to slow down the penetration of UV light.

Anti-wrinkle Sunscreen

The serious health risks associated with sun exposure are well documented. But if you are still tempted to skimp on sun protection to achieve a tan, consider this: did you know the sun is the single largest environmental cause of skin ageing problems? This includes loss of collagen, lines and wrinkles, pigmentation (sun/age spots), rosacea, etc. Certain studies show the sun to cause a staggering 90% of all skin damage.

So let me put it another way: Do you spend money on skincare and anti-ageing products? Do you apply them every day? If you answered ‘yes’, then why aren’t you protecting yourself against the most damaging environmental cause of all those signs of ageing? Considered in this way, sunscreen is one of the best anti-wrinkle creams you can buy.

Most people prefer thinner chemical sunscreens because they’re absorbed and aren’t visible. They often also contain other beneficial ingredients such as peptides and antioxidants. But, for certain people – with, for example, heat sensitive conditions such as melasma and rosacea – physical products can be a better choice; plus they provide immediate protection whereas chemical products should be applied 20 minutes prior to sun exposure.

There is no single right or wrong here, only the right product for your skin.

Quantity vs quality

One of the many reasons that people still suffer UV damage is by not applying or reapplying sunscreen correctly. You should reapply every two hours when in strong sun, during the summer months, skiing and most outdoor activities, and more often if swimming. Regardless of SPF or claims on labels, product efficacy diminishes over time and this is further exacerbated by swimming and perspiration. And, just because the sun may not be blazing down, UV damage will still occur.

Sunscreen vs SPF products

In spite of often inflated claims, no single product can block 100% of UV rays. But, using an antioxidant serum – either in or with an SPF or under your sun cream – helps to neutralise free radicals and further defend against damage, wrinkles, pigmentation and ageing. Natural make-up that allows your skin to breathe and provides SPF protection also helps. In clinic we use Image I Conceal and Jane Iredale mineral make-up as both provide SPF30 protection and actually enhance the skin. My advice is to combine sunscreen with SPF30-grade make-up plus skin products containing antioxidants and peptides.

Still confused? Ask an advanced skincare expert to advise you on the best products for your unique skin and lifestyle.

Have a healthy, happy summer.

Tracey x



Serenity Clinic Ltd, 162 Banks Road,
West Kirby, Wirral CH48 0RH
T: 0151 625 6256
www.serenity-clinic.co.uk