

SKIN CARE

How to Avoid Weird Tan Lines From Your Crazy-Cool Swimsuits

Pro-tips from three experts who'd know.



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You're headed to the beach or pool this summer and of course you've taken the time to thoroughly apply sunscreen on your precious face to protect it from UV damage and premature wrinkles, right? (Primer, here, for a refresher.) But don't just sloppily slap on some lotion or haphazardly spritz the rest of your body with whatever sunscreen you have

lying around. Your arms, legs, chest, neck, back — everything — need just as thorough coverage, especially with all the interesting swimwear out there these days.

Yes, those halter two-pieces, ultra strappy one-pieces and very Bella Hadid-ish, but complicated suits that you kind of have to wrap and tie yourself into are killer. But the downside to ultra-creative swimwear: crazy tan lines, which can be a distraction when you're wearing your cute strappy sundresses, crop tops and, well, other bathing suits you have on rotation. Plus: sun damage, people.

Of course, “the best way to avoid tan lines is not to get tan,” says dermatologist Heidi Waldorf, MD at Mount Sinai Hospital. But, in all honesty, it'll be pretty hard to keep most of us away from the pool or the beach this summer. So we need to make sure we use sunscreen the right way — obviously to protect our skin and stay healthy, but selfishly to avoid super weird tan lines, too. So we consulted a few experts for their tips.

Start with the right sunscreen.

All the experts agree that you need at least a SPF 30. “Always look for a sunscreen labeled 'broad spectrum,’” says Jeni Sykes, head of skincare at Heyday. This means the sunblock protects against both UVA and UVB rays. “The letters are scientific, but all you have to remember is 'A for Aging' and 'B for Burning,’” she adds. “UVB rays cause familiar sunburns, while UVA rays do quieter damage, causing wrinkles, skin cancer, and visible signs of aging that show up later. Broad Spectrum ensures you're covered for both.”

Although, “if you have sensitive skin, physical blocks tend to be less irritating to skin,” says Rebecca Kazin, MD, of the Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery and the Johns Hopkins Department of Dermatology. So look for sunblocks with inorganic compound ingredients like zinc oxide or titanium dioxide. These blocks won't be absorbed into the skin — sitting on the top of the skin's surface, instead.

It's all in the application.

Dr. Kazin and Dr. Waldorf both recommend applying sunscreen all over your entire body — and letting it dry — before you even put on your swimsuit and head out to the pool.

“That way you don't skip areas that are at the edges or that may become exposed when you move,” says Dr. Waldorf. If you don't have a helpful person on hand to make sure your back is fully coated, use a handheld applicator L'Applique — kind of like a back scratcher — to cover the hard to reach spots.

As for how much? Sykes has an interesting measuring method. “A good rule of thumb is a shot glass worth of SPF over your entire body,” she says. Or, if you're not familiar with the glassware, enough lotion to “generously cover your whole hand.”

The upside of an opaque lotion is you can actually see what and where you've applied. But sprays work, too — just take care to give yourself full coverage. “Make sure you rub it in after spraying and watch out for easy-to-miss spots, like behind the knees and your underarms,” adds Sykes. Either way, make sure you do this at least 30 minutes before heading out into the glorious, but skin-damaging sun.

Reapply regularly.

That means — repeat after us, multiple times — reapply every two hours. “SPF 30 is as high as you truly need as long as you remember to apply every 2 hours,” Dr. Kazin says. She even recommends going back inside, stripping down, and reapplying everywhere.

Even better, cover up with clothing.

You can wear your strappy, stringy, crazy tanline-inducing suit, but maybe throw on a rash guard over it while you're outside in the sun. After all, they make some really cute ones right now. “Having clothing as coverage means you don't need to reapply on those covered areas,” says Dr. Waldorf. Or wear a sun-obscuring, but totally chic, coverup over the suit, too.