

How to Find the Right SPF for You

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Raise your hand if you walk down the sunscreen aisle and immediately feel overwhelmed? (Us too!) From sprays to lotions, gels to oils, the options are endless, and the results? Well, unfortunately they can vary as well. For starters, the biggest discrepancy among sunscreens comes in the form of physical versus chemical. We talked to several derms to get the complete low down on sunscreen—plus their top picks!—so you can find out which is right for you!

What's the difference?

It's actually quite simple! "Physical sunscreens sit on top of the skin and deflect UV light," explains Dr. Rebecca Kazin, Associate Director at Washington Institute of Dermatologic Laser Surgery. "Chemical sunscreens, when exposed to UV light, undergo a chemical reaction and turn the UV light into heat, dissipating the UV light from the skin," she adds. Chemical blockers rely on chemical ingredients such as oxybenzone, avobenzone, homosalate, octocrylene, and octinoxate, which are absorbed into the skin to block out UV rays.

Which is right for you?

Chemical sunscreen: Because chemical sunscreens are absorbed into the skin, deeper levels of the skin are protected, but they require more time to work. According to Dr. Kazin, a chemical sunscreen should be applied 20 minutes prior to going out into the sun. "Chemical blockers need to be applied more frequently because they change more often when exposed to UV light," she adds. So if you're reaching for a chemical block, reapplying is essential!

However, many of the synthetic ingredients used in chemical blockers can cause skin irritation or worse, lasting health concerns. Many less expensive and mass market sunscreens use homosalate, a synthetic ingredient to help with absorption. "This ingredient is often used in large percentages and, aside from having a discernable lingering odor, can contribute to a heavy and greasy product feel," explains Dr. Joyce Imahiyerobo-Ip of South Shore Medical Center in Massachusetts.. "It may be better off for those with oily skin and breakout tendencies to avoid homosalate containing formulations." Not to mention, it can potentially disrupt hormone function!

Physical sunscreen: Common physical sunscreen ingredient, zinc oxide, is found in a number of creams and lotions and does an excellent job at preventing sunburns. And because physical blockers work by sitting atop the skin, they work immediately! But it comes with a cost: white residue. This white residue will show up on most skin types unless the particles have been formulated to be nanoparticles, says Dr. Imahiyerobo-Ip. However, these much smaller particles nanoparticles can actually get absorbed into the skin and might potentially be harmful, she adds. The solution? Look for microized zinc oxide sunscreen, which contains smaller particles that won't get absorbed into the skin, says Dr. Imahiyerobo-Ip

But don't discredit physical sunscreen just yet! Physical sunscreens are a cleaner alternative to chemical blockers and might be beneficial to those suffering from rosacea and even breakouts. Lastly, physical blockers are usually less irritating so those with sensitive skin should reach for a physical sunscreen, says Dr. Kazin.

Which products should you try?

HydroPeptide SPF 30 Anti-Wrinkle Skin Enhancing UV Protection, \$44 at DermStore.com



"I love it because it contains other helpful antioxidant botanicals like acai, green tea, as well as aloe, hyaluronic acid, which help to fight free radical damage, plus soothe and moisturize sun exposed skin," says Dr. Imahiyerobo-Ip.

Elta MD UV Clear Screen Lotion SPF 46, \$26 at DermStore.com



"This soothing formula is perfect for reactive or problematic skin. The lightweight, non-greasy feel is key; otherwise I've found many patients will not apply daily," says New York dermatologist Dr. Julie Russak.

Amarte Ultra Veil Sunscreen, \$56 at amarteskincare.com



"Amarte's Ultra Veil Sunscreen is a great example of a next-generation sunscreen that offers 40-minute water resistant Broad Spectrum SPF 50+ in a super light liquid," says California-based dermatologist Dr. Craig Kraffert. "It absorbs and dries quickly, yielding the highest FDA-recognized SPF protection available to protect the face, neck, and other sensitive areas sun protective clothing may not cover."

Colorescience SPF 30 Brush Sunforgettable Mineral Powder Sun Protection, \$57, Soap.com



"I think it's also good to have a sunscreen in a pressed powder for those days when you have be out in the sun, but also need to make sure to have perfect makeup! In those instances, I like Colorescience as a brand of pressed powder with SPF 50," adds Dr. Imahiyero-Ip.

SkinCeuticals Physical Matte UV Defense SPF 50, \$34 at bliss.com



Dr. Kazin recommends this one as a top physical sunscreen. And Influencers agree saying, it's ideal for anyone with oily skin.

Bottom line: No matter which sunscreen you opt for, the key to avoiding a nasty sunburn—and potentially preventing lasting sun damage—is through reapplying! Remember to reapply sunscreen every two hours and always use one with at least SPF 30.