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# Wear Sunscreen

The key to sun safety can be found in a bottle

WRITTEN BY JENNIFER L. NELSON

**I**ncidences of skin cancer continue to grow despite increased public awareness of the dangers related to sun exposure. So local dermatologists are dedicated to educating Bergen residents on the ways to safely enjoy a weekend down the shore, at a backyard barbecue, or on a day trip to a county lake.

Don't sweat it; there's no need to hide under turtlenecks to shield your skin on sweltering 90-degree afternoons. By following a few simple guidelines, you can reap the mental and physical benefits of some fun in the sun without leaving yourself vulnerable to the dangers associated with prolonged exposure.

"Some of the bigger dangers linked to sun exposure are wrinkles, thinned skin, and age spots, basal and squamous cell skin cancer, which usually aren't life threatening but will require surgery and can cause scarring, and malignant melanoma – a potentially life-threatening skin cancer that is increasing in number every year in the United States," says Dr. David J. Goldberg, director of Skin Laser & Surgery Specialists of NY/NJ, chief of dermatology at Hackensack University Medical Center, and clinical professor of dermatology at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey.

The good news: Dermatologists agree the key to staying safe in the sun is widely available and affordable, and can be found in a bottle.

"We all enjoy a sunny day, but the biggest mistake people make is heading outdoors without applying enough sunscreen," says **Dr. Rebecca Baxt**, a Paramus-based dermatologist.

While most people are aware of the need to slather on the white stuff before hitting the beach, not everyone knows just how much they need – and how often to reapply – to fully protect themselves. Packing the sunscreen for a day at the lake isn't enough – experts agree it has to be worn every single day, even if you're hopping in the car to run errands (the sun's dangerous ultraviolet radiation, or UV rays, penetrate car windows) or taking a quick walk around the block (studies have shown sun damage can occur after just 10 minutes).

Whether you've chosen an SPF 30 or SPF 75, a store brand or a name brand, dermatologists agree the proper application of sunscreen is far more important than the SPF level or the company who manufactures the lotion.

"If you didn't put on enough, or you're not reapplying throughout the day, you're not completely protected," Baxt says.

It becomes even more important to consistently reapply if you're sweating or swimming. But whether you're racing in a 5K or splashing at the pool, Baxt recommends reaching for the bottle at least every one or two hours – even on a cloudy day.

"People think they can skip the sunscreen when the sun isn't out," she says, "but you can be exposed to UV rays right through those clouds."

Just as you might read nutrition labels to check the fat or sodium content on a new snack item, consumers should check a sunscreen's ingredients list before purchasing – and if last summer's sunscreen is past its expiration date, it's best to buy new.

"I don't care if it's the cheapest sunscreen on the market," Baxt says. "If it includes physical blockers like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide, has more than one active ingredient, and it protects against UVA and UVB rays, then you're good to go."

Two other common mistakes are waiting too long to lather up on sunscreen and not applying it liberally below the neck.

"People put on sunscreen right before they go out in the sun, but they actually take about 30 minutes to work," Goldberg says. "You also can't just use it on your face and forget the rest of the sun-exposed areas on your body."

Baxt advises skipping spray sunscreens because they're often misused. Also, don't rely on cosmetic products that include SPF, because they don't provide adequate protection.

Of course, there are other precautions you can take to keep your entire family's skin safe this season. From wearing wide-brimmed hats while lounging on the patio to donning clothing or swimwear complete with SPF protection built right into the fabric when participating in outdoor sports, there is no shortage of ways to enjoy the sun safely in the summer months. ■

