

Spring. training for your Skin

Active women like us face a problem come warm weather: Even if you load on the sunscreen before heading out, you're getting way more skin damage than you think, finds new research. Here's how to protect and preserve.

By TULA KARRAS

This is a good news–bad news scenario: Nearly half of women wear sunscreen daily on their face, and more than a third regularly use it on other exposed areas, according to a 2015 survey of over 4,000 people published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. And those numbers are on the rise among active young women. Evidence is clear that broad-spectrum sunscreen, which fends off UVA and UVB rays, prevents wrinkles and helps reduce the incidence of skin cancer—90 percent of which is UV ray–related. Even the incidence of melanoma, the most deadly type of skin cancer, drops as a direct result of regular sunscreen use. Despite this, skin–cancer numbers

in people of all ages are going up, and melanoma is increasing faster in females ages 15 to 29 than in males in that age–group. (An estimated 34,940 new cases of invasive melanoma in all women will be diagnosed in the U.S. in 2017, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.) The uptick is due in part to more awareness, experts say. People today know the warning signs of skin cancer, so they are more likely to visit a dermatologist—which leads to an increase in diagnoses. This is, of course, what should be happening since “early treatment leads to increased survival,” says Hooman Khorasani, M.D., chief of the division of dermatologic and cosmetic surgery at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. But other factors are

at play that most directly affect outdoorsy women. For starters, a spike in travel may be partly to blame for the increase in cancer, Dr. Khorasani says. Today, air travel is cheaper and more available than ever, so people fly to areas where they can be outdoors year–round, swimming, hiking, biking, and marathoning. Plus, the thinning ozone layer is making the sun's effects stronger, and although we think we're being diligent about wearing sunscreen correctly, it turns out we likely aren't. Of course, this is no reason to stop exercising outdoors: You just need to safeguard your skin with these expert–endorsed ideas.

Embrace the big 3-0

You've likely heard that SPF 15 is the magic number, which is fine for brief walking–around coverage; otherwise, if you're going to be outside for more than an hour, you need an SPF 30 or higher. SPF 15 blocks 93 percent of the sun's rays, whereas SPF 30 blocks 97 percent, says Steven Q. Wang, M.D., the director of dermatologic surgery and dermatology at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. “That may not sound like much of a difference, but when you focus on the percentage of rays that are still getting through—7 percent versus 3 percent—you see that SPF 30 is more than twice as effective, and that adds up,” he says. The second reason for a higher

SPF: “People don’t apply enough sunscreen. A higher SPF helps compensate for under-application,” says Elizabeth Hale, M.D., a dermatologist and senior vice president of the Skin Cancer Foundation.

Doubleup

To get the promised SPF of any product, you need to apply a full shot-glass amount (1 ounce) of sunscreen to your body when you’re in a bathing suit. Of course, most people don’t have a shot glass around when they’re applying sunscreen, so Dr. Hale says that an equally effective, if less scientific, approach to getting sufficient coverage is to spread two coats onto all exposed parts. If you’re using a spray, be sure you can see an even sheen on your skin.

Beselective

Not all sunscreens live up to their SPF claims, even when applied appropriately. Last year, *Consumer Reports* tested more than 60 products with an SPF 30 or higher and found that 43 percent did not meet the SPF stated on the bottle; a few products fell so short they didn’t even hit an SPF of 15. The worst offenders were those that used mineral sunblocks: zinc oxide, titanium oxide, or both. Eighty percent of the chemical sunscreens (UV filters like oxybenzone and avobenzone) with an SPF 40 or higher were A-OK. That said, some people can develop a sensitivity to the chemicals or prefer a mineral block because it’s more natural. So if you can’t rely on a label, what can you do? Rely on a seal. Look for products that have the Skin Cancer Foundation Seal of Recommendation, says Dr. Hale. If you’re active outdoors, look for the Active Seal,

You can absolutely spend your days playing in the sun and avoid skin damage. It just takes a few smart moves to cover all your bases.



which ensures the product is water-resistant. (Not all products display the seals on their packaging, so go to skincancer.org/prevention/seal-of-recommendation to find the ones that qualify.) These have all been reviewed by independent experts who are looking at factors that the FDA may not. Finally, check the expiration date. Sunscreens are required to stay shelf-stable for three years after being manufactured. Beyond that, you’re probably not getting the protection you paid for. (Store your stash in a cool area. Active ingredients can break down when they overheat.)

Boost the UPF of your outfit

“Even the best sunscreen breaks down after a few hours,” says Anna Chien, M.D., assistant professor of dermatology at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. So you need backup. That means using sun-protective clothing, wide-brimmed hats, and eyewear when you exercise outdoors (and consider planning your workout before or after the 10-to-2 hot zone when rays are strongest). Sun-protective clothing is a favorite of doctors because it won’t rinse off or lose its potency. Look for UPF-labeled clothing of at least 30 and preferably 50 or more (a UPF of 50 means that the garment only allows one 50th of the sun’s rays through to your skin). “I also tell patients to choose garments that are tight-fitting and dark since those will block more rays than lighter-colored clothing with a loose weave,” says Dr. Hale, who adds that a white tee only has an SPF of 7.

Don’t trust the shade

Sticking to runs along heavily tree-lined routes and ducking under an umbrella between water sports is an au naturel way to limit sun exposure, but it’s not foolproof. A recent study in the journal *JAMA Dermatology* revealed that people under a beach umbrella who were not wearing sunscreen had a higher incidence of severe sunburn than those in the sun wearing sunscreen. “Reflected light from the sand, water, and pavement scatters rays back onto you,” explains Dr. Wang, one of the study authors.

Increase your reps

If you are going on a three-hour hike or plan to spend half the day kayaking, a single application of sunscreen will not see you through. “Some of my patients mistakenly think that putting on sunscreen in the morning gives them a free pass to stay out all day,” Dr. Hale says. The temptation may be even greater the higher the SPF: “There can be a false sense of protection with an SPF of 100,” says Dr. Chien. All sunscreens should be reapplied at least every two hours (and possibly more frequently if you’re on a medication that makes you extra sun-sensitive, such as NSAIDs, Retin A, and certain antibiotics). Also, water-resistant doesn’t mean waterproof. If you’re playing beach volleyball or running a half marathon, reapply a water-resistant formula every 40 or 80 minutes (check the label), because you’ll likely sweat off a lot. “The frequency with which you put on sunscreen is the most important thing you can do to stay protected,” says Dr. Khorasani. ★