

PHYSICAL BLOCK SUNSCREENS

There are actually two different types of sunscreens available over the counter. The usual sunscreens are those that contain a chemical such as Parsol 1789 (avobenzone), octyl methoxycinnamate, and oxybenzone. These chemicals work by absorbing some or most of the ultraviolet rays in sunlight to prevent the rays from burning or damaging your skin.

A physical block type of sunscreen has significant advantages. It actually blocks or reflects the ultraviolet light from entering the skin. By accomplishing this, these products prevent exposure to a broader spectrum of UV light and also prevent reactions to the chemicals.

You probably have seen lifeguards at the beach with the white greasy paste on their noses. This product is zinc oxide. This is one type of physical block sunscreen. The other type contains titanium dioxide. Although these products are the best sunblocks, the white greasy appearance limited their use.

Fortunately science has advanced to produce sunblock products with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide that rub in well and do not leave the visible white film. Since these products actually block both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) light they are very effective. These block type sunscreens are also the best if there are any unusual sun allergies or sun reactions.

Some common brand names of physical block sunscreens are Neutrogena chemical free sun block, Spectra3 by Coppertone, or PreSun block. You can check the lists of any other products to determine the active ingredients. Make sure that you are using a product that contains zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide.

Although physical block sunscreens have many advantages they are somewhat thicker and require more rubbing to get them to disappear. There are two other options for products which are as effective as the physical block sunscreens. These are the Neutrogena UltraSheer line of sunscreens or mexoryl containing sunscreens.

The Neutrogena UltraSheer sunscreens contain Parsol 1789 (Avobenzone) which is an excellent UVA blocker. The problem is that Parsol 1789 (Avobenzone) is unstable and can break down from sun exposure. The UltraSheer products have a special technology, Helioplex, to stabilize the Parsol 1789 (Avobenzone) so it continues to be effective over time. These are the best currently available sunscreens in the USA and are very easy to apply.

Mexoryl containing sunscreens from LaRoche-Posay (brand name Anthelios) were recently approved in the United States. They can be purchased in Canada as well. Mexoryl has a better UVA blocking capability than traditional sunscreens. These products also serve as an excellent daily moisturizer/sunscreen if you need one.

If you are consistent with the regular use of sunscreen products, there is a theoretical risk of developing low vitamin D levels. This is because sun exposure can increase your vitamin D levels. Since we know that sun exposure causes skin cancer, sunlight exposure to is not the best way to obtain vitamin D. My suggestion is to take a vitamin D supplement along with calcium on a regular basis. These products are often combined as a single pill. Two of the common brand names are Caltrate and Os-Cal. Many patients who enjoy dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese, do not have to worry about taking extra vitamin D or calcium. If this is the case with you, then a supplement may not be necessary.

If you have any questions about the sunscreens please ask me before you leave the office.