

Edited by Sara Gaynes Levy

## How to Be Smarter About Skin Cancer

We're *all* startlingly misinformed.  
But it's easy to be right!

By Jennifer Gerson Uffalussy

### Pay extra attention to arms and legs:

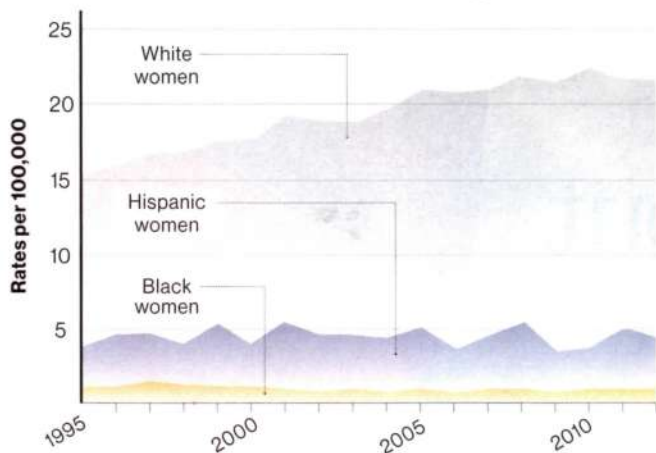
59 percent of melanomas show up here. "It's so common for women to use sunscreen on their face but not on other exposed skin," says Holman.

### The best color to wear in the sun?

That would be red. It has nearly twice the ultraviolet protection factor (UPF, similar to SPF) of other shades.

**W**e have so many sun-fighting products at our fingertips—SPF sprays and balms, even clothing. Yet melanoma rates for women have *doubled* in the last 30 years. It's confounding, since 73 percent of us say we try to shield our skin from the sun. What's going on? For one thing, those SPF's may give us false security. "If you use sunscreen improperly, in some ways you're at a greater risk for burns [than wearing none], because you *think* you're covered, when in reality you're not as protected as you believe," says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., an assistant professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City. And SPF may tempt us to flout other precautions too: "People use sunscreen to stay out longer," says Dawn M. Holman, a cancer researcher at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. So how can *you* stay safe? Follow our illustrated guide.

# Who's Getting Skin Cancer?



*Melanoma is the deadliest skin cancer, and rates are climbing among white women—an estimated 37,416 will be diagnosed this year, up 2 percent from last year (they're steady for other races). "The rise is likely the result of excess tanning," says Dr. Zeichner.*

## Myth Buster!

"People often say, 'There's no point in wearing sunscreen because all the damage is done in childhood,'" says Arielle Kauvar, M.D., founding director of New York Laser & Skin Care. Not true—sun exposure is spread out over your life.



- **23%** of your total sun exposure occurs from infancy to age 18.
- **25%** happens from age 19 to 40.
- **26%** occurs from age 41 to 59.
- And **26%** hits in retirement, ages 60 to 78.

## Which Fabrics Block Sun Most?

You can buy protective clothing, but check out the UPF rating of your closet staples first (you want more than 50 for top protection).

### GOOD FABRICS



Denim: UPF 1,700 (!!)



Nylon: UPF 952



Nylon-elastane: UPF 161



Cotton, unbleached: UPF 82

### NOT AS GOOD



Poly-cotton: UPF 41



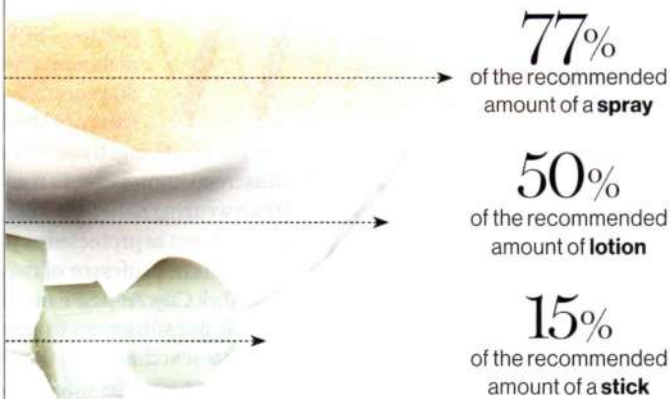
Polyester: UPF 41

We repeat: Sunscreen is not an excuse to bake.



## You're Not Wearing Enough SPF

No matter which type of sunscreen you choose, odds are you're not using as much as you should. How much of each formula women tend to apply:



Women get more protection from spray SPF's—not from magical ingredients but because we typically *apply* more of them, research has found. With spray and especially other types, when you feel like you're done putting it on, you've probably just gotten started. And don't forget to reapply!

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If you've used a tanning bed once in your life, your risk for melanoma increases by **23%**

And if you used a tanning bed for more than a year, your risk goes up by a massive **61%**

**Bottom line?** The FDA, the WHO, and the CDC agree: Tanning beds are carcinogenic. Cut it out!

# The New Sun Number You Need to Know



You know to look at the SPF number on the bottle, but do you check the UV Index of where you live? It's easy to find; it's listed in weather apps, or see the average late-May numbers for a few cities above. On any given day the higher the number, the faster you'll burn—even if you don't spend much time outdoors. "If it's not too hot, or even that sunny, you may think you don't need to worry, but the rating may show otherwise," says Holman. Anything above five means a high risk of sun damage from unprotected time outside.

## What Your Hair Color Says About Your Cancer Risk

Natural redheads (of all skin tones) have a 102 percent higher risk of non-melanoma skin cancer than brunettes.



### Shocking Stat

# 1.6%

of dermatologists—so few!—suggest sunscreen at all patient visits. So remembering SPF is on you; it might prevent a scary trip to their offices.

## The Shadow Test

*Instant check to see whether you need to move out of the sun: Look at your shadow. Is it shorter than you are? Then the rays are strong, and you're more likely to burn. Cover up, or find shade.*



# Take Our Lifesaving Test!

When checking your skin, remember your **ABCDE**'s: Does a mole or spot have an **asymmetrical** shape? Is the **border** irregular or jagged? Is the **color** uneven? Is the **diameter** of the mole or spot larger than a pea? Has the mole or spot **evolved** during the past few weeks or months? If so, see a derm immediately. Some of what you might find in your monthly self-check:

### Normal mole

These are mostly round and usually brown, beige, or pink. They could be flat or a slight bump, but the size, shape, or color doesn't change over time.



### Dysplastic nevus

These have irregular borders or colors. They are benign, but can become cancerous, so you and your derm should keep an eye on them.



### Actinic keratosis

Check for a rough or bumpy texture and a red or pink color. They're also not cancerous, but could develop into a squamous or basal cell cancer.



### Basal cell carcinoma

Shiny and pink and keeps getting bigger? It might be BCC, the most common form of skin cancer. Because of its fast growth rate, head to a doctor ASAP.



### Squamous cell carcinoma

The telltale divot in the center of this bump is a warning sign of SCC, the second most common type of skin cancer.



### Melanoma

These growths are often dark or varied in color and unusually shaped. Catch them early—an estimated 3,380 women will die from melanoma this year.



HAIR: LEIBOWITZ PICTURES; WOMAN SHADOW: ANCA AVRAMI/SHUTTERSTOCK; NORMAL MOLE: ARIELLE KAGAR; M.D.; DYSPLASTIC NEVUS: SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA: PHOTOFEST; BCC: DR. JOHN M. HOSPITAL; MELANOMA: NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE; ALL OTHER MOLES: THE SKIN CANCER FOUNDATION