



From the Archives: Summer 2005 Lupus Now magazine

Sun Safety Myths

There are many misconceptions about how to stay safe in the sun. Be aware of what's not true about sun protection:

- 1. A beach umbrella keeps you safe from the sun.**
Don't be fooled: A large percentage of ultraviolet (UV) light bounces off the sand onto your skin, even if you're under an umbrella. Water and snow have the same reflective effect.
- 2. Sunscreen with an SPF of 45 is three times more effective than an SPF of 15.**
Just because the SPF is a higher number doesn't mean it's offering a higher degree of protection. In fact, an SPF 45 sunscreen gives only about five percent more protection than an SPF 15 screen. Also, higher-rated screens don't last any longer than lower-rated products.
- 3. Building a "base" tan protects against sunburn.**
There is no such thing as a "safe" tan that will offer protection later. Exposure to UV rays increases your lifetime risk of skin cancer and other skin damage.
- 4. "Self-tanning" products help protect against sunburn.**
These products may be perfectly safe and may be a good way to make yourself appear tan without having actual sun exposure. But be aware that the dyes in self-tanning lotions and sprays don't offer complete UV protection. According to long-time editorial advisor Richard D. Sontheimer, M.D., the common active ingredient in self-tanning products, dihydroxyacetone, is well-recognized to modestly block some UVA and visible light wavelengths, and might also provide some degree of protection against the sunburning UVB rays.
- 5. Only the people with cutaneous lupus, or with systemic lupus and photosensitivity, need to worry about UV protection.**
No matter how lupus affects you, you need to be aware that certain medications can make you unusually reactive to UV light. Called "chemical photosensitivity," this can result in sunburn or rash after even brief sun exposure. The drugs known to cause this type of skin sensitivity are antihistamines, diuretics, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs and antibiotics, including tetracycline or "sulfa" drugs. Sunscreens offer only limited UV protection for anyone taking these medications, so if any of these are part of your treatment, talk to your doctor and pharmacist about special sun-avoidance strategies. (Adapted from Bottom Line Health newsletter, June 2003)

Sun Safety Update

This article has been updated since it was first posted. Long-time editorial advisor Richard D. Sontheimer, M.D., Professor and Vice-Chairman, Department of Dermatology and Fleischaker Endowed Chair in Dermatology at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center, Oklahoma City, wrote to clarify one point in the Summer 2005 issue of Lupus News, in the "Sun Safety Myths" section of the Wellness article, "Color Matters." The discussion under #4 and was changed to reflect currently available information. The common active ingredient in self-tanning products, dihydroxyacetone, is well-recognized to modestly block some UVA and visible light wavelengths, and might also provide some degree of protection against the sunburning UVB rays. The original text indicated these products offered no UV light protection.