



# Your sunscreen basics

Brush up before you brush it on and head out into the summer sun

Wear sunscreen? Easier said than done given today's product choices. High SPF or low SPF? Natural or chemical? Lotion, spray or gel? Now there's even more to consider, says Toronto dermatologist Dr. Julia Carroll: The wrong sunscreen can be bad for your skin health.

"It's true that the best sunscreen is the one you put on," says Dr. Carroll who lectures on sunscreen to medical students at the University of Toronto. But while any sunscreen protects from sun damage, some sunscreens can be harmful to certain skin conditions, she says. Others are not what you think they are.

Brush up on sunscreen basics to ensure your skin is safe and healthy this summer. Begin by becoming aware that there are two types of sunscreen — physical and chemical blockers — because using



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the wrong one could make a bad skin condition worse.

"Physical blockers scatter the UV rays so they don't get into the skin," she explains. "Chemical blockers take the UV rays and translate them into actual heat which is how they neutralize the UVs." Physical blockers contain titanium and zinc, whereas chemical blockers contain octisalate, avobenzone, and oxybenzone — the latter which may cause an allergic reaction and, some claim, is a potential hormone

### GREAT SUMMER SKIN

"It's the same as with cars: You need a summer skin routine," says dermatologist Dr. Julia Carroll. She suggests washing with a cleanser (check out [www.cetaphyl.ca](http://www.cetaphyl.ca) for choices) before applying a topical Vitamin C serum to help reverse facial sun damage, then using a light moisturizer under makeup. Cleanse seriously at night to remove layers of makeup and city grime (sonic cleansing systems are especially good for acne-prone skin) and moisturize again.

disrupter.

Now, take that knowledge and apply it to your own skin needs. For instance, people with rosacea, a common red, rashy facial skin condition triggered by heat, should use only a physical blocker and avoid the chemical ones which make your face feel hot. (Check out [rosaceainfo.com](http://rosaceainfo.com) for more sun protection tips and [dermatology.ca](http://dermatology.ca) for sunscreen recommendations.) People who have acne should make sure their sunscreen is

oil-free; physical blocker sunscreen gels or sprays are best for their acne-prone skin, she says.

Of course SPF numbers are important, but they are not entirely reliable. SPF numbers are calculated through lab tests during which sunscreen is smeared on more thickly than in real life situations; SPF is a measure of how well a sunscreen deflects only the UVB, not UVA rays, and an SPF of 60 is not necessarily twice as effective as one with



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SPF 30.

"I tell my patients to put on at least an SPF 30 every day, and to choose a broad spectrum sunscreen which covers both UVA and UVB rays," says Dr. Carroll. She doesn't believe that waterproof sunblocks exist. "They only give people false hope."

Sunscreens can protect

all day — but not if your day includes some significant outdoor time. "Even if you are sitting outside at lunch, reapply," Dr. Carroll says. As for wearing sunscreen under makeup, do: This skin doc uses a moisturizer with an SPF of 30 under her makeup.

When it comes to natural versus organic in the sunscreen world, confusion reigns. "The natural sunscreens are the physical blockers, but they are (chemically speaking) inorganic," she says, adding that as strange as it sounds the chemical blockers are actually the organic ones. "If you want a natural sunscreen avoid the chemical blockers and use titanium and zinc-based sunscreens."

Dr. Carroll's three rules for sun protection: Seek shade, cover up when and where you can, and don't forget the sunscreen.