

Shedding Light on Sunscreen Claims

FDA Standards for Over-the-Counter Sunscreen



Confused by sunscreen labeling and not sure exactly what protection each product offers?

Be unsure no more: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has a new standard test for over-the-counter sunscreen that determines which products are permitted to use “broad spectrum” on their labels.

Under the new labeling requirements, sunscreens using that claim have passed a test that shows they provide protection against ultraviolet B (UVB) and ultraviolet A (UVA) rays, and all types of skin damage caused by the sun. While UVB is the primary culprit in sunburn, both types of rays can cause sunburn, skin cancer and skin aging.

These products will also carry a label showing a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Sunscreen products that aren’t labeled broad spectrum or that have an SPF of 2 to 14 will include the warning “This product has been shown only to help prevent sunburn, not skin cancer or early skin aging.”

As for water resistance, labels must now show how long a user can expect protection while swimming or sweating: either 40 minutes or 80 minutes. The words “waterproof,” “sweatproof,” “sunblock” and “instant protection” will not be permitted on labeling, nor will claims of protection lasting more than two hours without reapplication, unless the manufacturer has testing data — as well as FDA approval — to back those claims up.



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