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SKIN CARE

## 10 Annoying Statements Dermatologists Still Hear About Sunscreen

The SPF saga continues.

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By Liz Ritter, Executive Editor · July 7, 2022



**S**ettle on in for the time-told tale of **sunscreen**: That product we all know we need, yet still seem to have such a hard time accepting, understanding, reapplying and then applying again. And, while there may be no such thing as a “dumb question,” these top dermatologists say, when it comes to **SPF**, these less-than-solid statements seem to pop up time and time again with their family, friends and patients.

## **01: Why do I have to wear daily sunscreen? I'm not at the beach.**

Louisville, KY dermatologist Tami Buss Cassis, MD says she hears this defense a lot, and couples it with its close friend of the “accidental bronzed” fib: “I swear I put my sunscreen on; I just tan really easily.” Yes, she stresses, you still need it and, yes, she can tell when you didn't apply it.

## **02: But I'm inside all day!**

Sorry, desk-dwellers, Montclair, NJ dermatologist Jeanine B. Downie, MD says this repeated remark is one of her biggest pet peeves. “I tell people that you must wear SPF 30 or higher and reapply sunscreen every day regardless of whether you are inside or outside,” she says. “Remember, we react to indoor lighting and outdoor lighting, the blue light from the phone, the computer, the Apple Watch and the iPad.”

Plus, glass is not the great protector. “**UVA rays**, the longer ones that penetrate deeper into the skin, also pass-through window glass,” explains Campbell, CA dermatologist Amelia K. Hausauer, MD, who includes car windows and home windows in that category. “I advise wearing sunscreen every single day regardless of indoor activity. This is especially true if you suffer from pigmentation conditions such as melasma, which is exquisitely sun sensitive. A number of my patients who were working from home during COVID didn't understand why their melasma was worsening until we started a diligent indoor, as well as outdoor, sun protection regimen.”

## **03: I have dark skin though.**

Mark this one down as a sunscreen myth that's mandatory to shake. “I consistently get asked by Asian/Indigenous/Latina/African Americans why they have to wear sunscreen,” Dr. Downie says. “They act like it is only for Caucasians. I tell them this is a racist construct. Anyone with skin needs to wear sunscreen every single day rain or shine, regardless of ethnicity!”

## **04: You can't get burned in the water.**

Wrong! UVB rays penetrate water, particularly shallow water, in some pools, Dr. Hausauer explains, adding that snow isn't any better. “Additionally, the light reflects off the water's surface, leading to increased exposure of skin not underneath (i.e. face, upper body, anything on a flotation toy) and increased sunburn. The same reflection occurs off snow which is why you can easily burn at the high altitudes.”

## **05: I get it, but it's overcast.**

Being in the San Francisco Bay area (read: fog), Dr. Hausauer hears this one a lot. “It's typically ingrained in most people nowadays to wear sunscreen if at the pool or beach, but not everyone thinks about day-to-day exposure, especially in cold or less sunny climates. However, this adds up and can contribute to significant amounts of sun damage and skin cancer. Clouds don't block damaging and harmful UV rays. Even if you feel cooler, the **Skin Cancer Foundation** estimates that overcast skies block only about 25-percent of UVA and UVB rays that can cause skin cancer and aging. And because you don't feel as warm or burned, you are more likely to spend extra time in outdoors creating higher cumulative damage.”

## 06: My makeup protects me.

New York dermatologist **Jody A. Levine, MD** lists this as a really big misconception she'd like to clear up. "It's upsetting when patients insist that the sun protection in their makeup is sufficient. The simple answer is, 'No—it's not!' Any additional protection is welcome, but proper sunscreen is still needed, especially in the summer. Plus the amount of makeup that is used is probably not enough to qualify for the sun protection on the bottle."

"It's no wonder that you'll never find a dermatologist without their sunscreen on, because we see every day how damaging the sun can be." —Dr. Honet

## 07: My vitamin D is low, so I don't wear sunscreen.

Repeat: The safest way to get more vitamin D is from diet and supplementation, Bloomfield Hills, MI dermatologist Linda C. Honet, MD stresses. "Exposing unprotected skin is another way, but with the increasing and alarming rates of **skin cancer and melanoma** in the United States, the better and safer way is dietary supplementation."

## 08: There are so many treatments that can fix it later.

Yes, your dermatologist may have a large menu of solutions for sun damage, but that doesn't mean they're a magic eraser. "Some of my young patients tell me that it is OK if they sit in the sun without sun protection, as when they are older, I will take care of their skin with lasers and get rid of any damage," **Dr. Levine** shares. "I've explained that, while the lasers are wonderful for improving the cosmetic appearance of photo damage, our lasers are not going to prevent skin cancer. Sun protection at a young age is a must!"

## 09: Anything higher than an SPF 15 is a waste of money

Two words: Not true. "Although the incremental percentage increase in protection with a higher SPF may not be huge, this higher SPF may make all the difference between burning and not burning in the sun," notes Dr. Honet, who shared this "hears-it-a-bunch" memo. "And remember that any slightest amount of a pink glow is a sign of the sun damaging the skin. I recommend an SPF 45 for all my patients."

## 10: Chemical sunscreens are toxic

Rest assured, the FDA is intimately involved in regulating sunscreen and any skin-care items that claim an SPF. "The FDA ranks safety as one of the biggest parameters when evaluating and approving SPF ingredients," Dr. Honet explains. "Although ongoing studies are absolutely necessary, we know that protecting your skin from the sun definitely reduces the risk of skin cancer and melanoma, not to mention wrinkles and saggy, baggy skin. And remember, there is no sunscreen that can completely block the sun's damaging rays. Sunscreen is just one tool among many that can reduce your sun exposure and risk for sun damage."