

Women's Health

9 Best Sunscreens For Sensitive Skin, Tested By Experts

Repel the sun's rays without risking irritation.



BRIGITT EARLEY | March 11, 2024

When your skin is sensitive—you know. You break out at the drop of a hat or end up with a red rash after adding new products to your skincare routine. This can make it hard to find the right sunscreen. So many are goopy and contain all kinds of chemicals, not to mention layering products like sunscreen and makeup rarely goes well for those with sensitive skin.

Thankfully, today's sunscreens for sensitive skin are lightyears better than the ones you grew up slathering on. So, yes, you do have to wear sunscreen every day. But, no, you don't have to fear it.

The best sunscreens for sensitive skin

What to consider

When you're weeding through all of the options out there, dermatologists say to keep the following in mind:

Type

"For sensitive skin, mineral sunscreens are generally considered the safest choice," says dermatologist Annabelle Garcia, MD. "They utilize zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, which sit on top of the skin and physically block UV rays, minimizing irritation potential." Chemical sunscreens, which absorb UV rays, can sometimes trigger reactions in sensitive individuals.

Active ingredients

If you have sensitive skin, look for products with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, says dermatologist **Jody A. Levine, MD**. The only downside? "These ingredients can be drying," she says. **Dr. Levine** recommends applying a high-quality moisturizer first. You may also want to look for SPF with other skin-nourishing ingredients, including hyaluronic acid, squalane, and niacinamide.

SPF

The American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommends using broad-spectrum sunscreen (these formulas protect against both UVA and UVB rays) with an SPF of 30 or higher, though some dermatologists are quick to recommend formulas with SPF 50 or more.

Water-resistance

If you're active or spending time in the water, use a water-resistant sunscreen. Some formulas are water-resistant for up to 40 minutes, but the best ones will offer protection for up to 80 minutes.

How we selected

For the past few months, *Women's Health* editors, including contributor Brigitt Earley researched and tested the bestselling, most popular, and top-rated face sunscreens, evaluating thousands of customer reviews and ratings. Our team also consulted a wide range of dermatologists for their top picks.

Whether you're looking for a sunscreens for your face or body, below see our expert-approved list of the best sunscreens for sensitive skin, tested by dermatologists and Women's Health editors.

BEST OVERALL SUNSCREEN FOR SENSITIVE SKIN

EltaMD UV Clear Face Sunscreen SPF 46

Nearly every dermatologist I've ever spoken to has recommended this sunscreen. "It's a great daily moisturizer with a lightweight, silky formulation that helps keep skin protected, moisturized, and clear," says **Dr. Levine**. "Its zinc oxide 9% and octinoxate 7.5% guard against UVA and UVB damage, and its high-purity niacinamide calms and soothes sensitive or acne-prone skin."

It's also a favorite of WH lifestyle director Lindsay Geller, whose dermatologist recommended it to help reduce the appearance of blemishes and discoloration associated with her hormonal breakouts. "I've definitely noticed an improvement in my skin since incorporating this sunscreen into my daily routine, and I love that it doesn't leave a white cast or irritate my eyes (which others have in the past)," she says. "My doc told me that the best sunscreen for you is simply the one you'll actually use daily and, from firsthand experience, I can confirm that's true."



PROS

- ⊕ Clear formula doesn't leave a white cast
- ⊕ Won't cause breakouts

CONS

- ⊗ Testers say it's hard to rub in, but it spreads easier into moisturized skin

BEST BUDGET SUNSCREEN FOR SENSITIVE SKIN

Cetaphil Sheer Mineral Sunscreen Lotion

Cetaphil is a brand that's often recommended by dermatologists when sensitive skin enters the chat. It's no surprise, given the brand makes all kinds of hypoallergenic products, including this sunscreen. "I love that this sunscreen provides long-lasting sun protection with 80 minutes of water resistance and nourishes the skin with vitamin E," says founder of Integrative Aesthetics Rahi Sarbaziha, MD. Our also testers say the all-mineral formula glides on like butter, but doesn't clog pores.



PROS

- ⊕ Lightweight serum-like consistency feels weightless on skin
- ⊕ Suitable for face and body

CONS

- ⊗ May leave a slight white cast on some skin tones

BEST FACE SUNSCREEN FOR SENSITIVE SKIN

La Roche-Posay Anthelios Mineral Ultra-Light Face Sunscreen SPF 50

La-Roche Posay's Anthelios sunscreen is one of Dr. Garcia's top picks. "This lightweight, fragrance-free, and oil-free formula contains zinc oxide and titanium dioxide, making it suitable for even the most sensitive skin," says Dr. Garcia.

Our testers say the liquid formula is quick to absorb and feels weightless—undetectable, really—on the skin. We love that it has skin benefits beyond sun protection, too. The ingredient list boasts hydrators like vitamin E to keep skin moisturized. The brand also makes tinted versions of the same lotion, if you prefer a touch of color.



PROS

- ⊕ Hydrating
- ⊕ High SPF

CONS

- ⊗ Only water-resistant for 40 minutes

BEST SUNSCREEN FOR YOUR BODY

Blue Lizard Sensitive Mineral Sunscreen With Zinc Oxide SPF 50+

"Blue Lizard is a great option for both babies and adults with sensitive-skin," says board-certified dermatologist Dendy Engelman, MD. "It contains green tea extract, which is perfect for sensitive skin, as it addresses redness and soothes any irritation and inflammation on the skin." She says it spreads more smoothly than your average mineral SPF, plus is sweat-proof and water-resistant for up to 80 minutes, too. "It is also fragrance-free and paraben-free, making it ideal for sensitive and acne-prone skin types," she adds.

Our testers thought the color-changing bottle was a pretty cool feature, as well. The packaging changes color when UV rays are present to alert you to put on your sunscreen.



PROS

- ⊕ Suitable for acne-prone skin
- ⊕ Color-changing bottle helps you know when to apply SPF

CONS

- ⊗ Some users say it's a bit hard to rub in

BEST FOR DRY SKIN

Ilia Super Serum Skin Tint SPF 40

Mineral sunscreen tends to be more well-tolerated by sensitive skin, says board-certified dermatologist Nikki Hill, MD. But here's the conundrum: Since these products sit on top of the skin, acting like a sun shield of sorts, she hears a lot of complaints about the white cast they leave behind. The workaround, she says? Tinted formulas, like this one.

Our testers are also big fans of this formula, particularly because of how hydrating it is. Thanks to niacinamide, squalane, and hyaluronic acid, this SPF feels more like moisturizer—perfect for dry skin.



PROS

- ⊕ Comes in 28 shades
- ⊕ Hydrating formula

CONS

- ⊗ Some users say it's not suitable for oily skin

BEST FOR DARKER SKIN

Tower 28 Beauty SunnyDays SPF 30 Tinted Sunscreen Foundation

We love this mineral sunscreen–foundation combo so much that it earned a 2022 Women's Health Beauty Award. The two-in-one product is so lightweight and so sheer, but offers a natural finish that helps blur any acne or blemishes while protecting you with SPF 30.

It's one of Dr. Hill's favorites, too, noting that it's a great pick for people with darker skin who want to avoid the dreaded white cast. As a nice bonus, you'll also get two additional skin protectors: prickly pear extract, which fights off blue light pollution, and white sage extract, which neutralizes free radicals from the sun.



PROS

- ⊕ Comes in 17 shades
- ⊕ Suitable for acne-prone skin

CONS

- ⊗ Not water-resistant

BEST FOR OILY SKIN

SkinMedica Essential Defense Mineral Shield SPF 32 Tinted Sunscreen

"I first discovered this sunscreen when my esthetician applied it after a facial where she performed extractions all over my face," says WH contributor Cristina Montemayor. "After such an extensive facial, I thought the sunscreen would at least sting a little, but it actually felt soothing on my skin." The secret to this? The formula contains green tea and caffeine to reduce inflammation and calm any irritation. "I took a bottle home with me that day and it's been a staple in my routine ever since," says Montemayor.

Yes, it's pricey, but if you deal with oily skin or constant flare-ups, it's a fully justifiable expense. The SPF is oil-free and non-comedogenic, plus hypoallergenic and fragrance and paraben-free.



PROS

- ⊕ Reduces redness
- ⊕ Leaves a semi-matte finish

CONS

- ⊗ Not water-resistant

BEST STICK SUNSCREEN FOR SENSITIVE SKIN

Mustela Baby Mineral Sunscreen Stick SPF 50

Sunscreen sticks are easy to stash in your purse or beach tote, making them super easy to reapply on the go. They're also great for kids, since they can more easily apply the formula themselves. If you're going to go this route, you can't go wrong with Mustela's, which is so great for sensitive skin that it earned a seal of approval from the National Eczema Association.

Dermatologists we spoke to back it, too. "The SPF 50 stick is made with zinc oxide, so it's an entirely mineral sunscreen," says board-certified dermatologist Debra Jaliman, MD. "It has 70 percent organic ingredients and is fragrance free, too."



PROS

- ⊕ Easy to apply
- ⊕ Largely organic ingredients

CONS

- ⊗ May leave a white cast on some skin tones

BEST SUNSCREEN WITH A HIGH SPF

Neutrogena Ultra Sheer Dry-Touch Sunscreen SPF 70

When you want to make sure you're giving your skin as much protection as possible, reach for this drugstore SPF. The broad-spectrum formula boasts SPF 70, but you'd never know it because it dries 100 percent clear and feels invisible on skin. "This sunscreen has been clinically shown to provide better sunburn protection compared to products with a lower SPF," says board-certified dermatologist Joshua Zeichner, MD. "It dries fully on the skin without leaving a greasy feeling on the face."

Our testers appreciated the high SPF, but also noted that the product stood out because it was easy to rub in and didn't feel greasy or oily after application.



PROS

- ⊕ High SPF
- ⊕ Doesn't leave a white cast

CONS

- ⊗ Not a mineral sunscreen

Meet the experts

- Annabelle Garcia, MD, is a board-certified dermatologist at Sonterra Dermatology in Texas.
- **Jody A. Levine, MD**, is a board-certified dermatologist at Plastic Surgery & Dermatology of NYC.
- Rahi Sarbaziha, MD, is a an anti-aging and integrative aesthetics specialist in Beverly Hills, CA.
- Dendy Engelman, MD, is a board-certified dermatologist at Manhattan Dermatology & Cosmetic Surgery.
- Nikki Hill, MD, is a board-certified dermatologist at The Skin of Culture and Hair (SOCAH) Center in Atlanta.
- Debra Jaliman, MD, is a board-certified dermatologist with a private practice in NYC.
- Joshua Zeichner, MD, is a board-certified dermatologist at Zeichner dermatologist.