



Safer Sunscreen – by Julie Mau

As we spend more time outdoors in the summer, we reach for sunscreen to protect us from sunburn and reduce our risk of skin cancer. Rates of melanoma have tripled in the past 30 years, and we are more conscious of using sunscreen to protect ourselves from the sun's harmful rays. But what sunscreens are truly safe?

Research shows that many sunscreens contain chemicals that are estrogenic, disrupt the endocrine system, disrupt the immune system, and can play a role in cancer development.

Chemical vs. Physical

Chemical sunscreens are absorbed into the skin and body, and act like a sponge against UV rays. Oxybenzone (an estrogenic and an endocrine disruptor) is a chemical that is used in a vast majority of sunscreens, skincare products, lip sticks and lip balm. A 2008 study from the CDC showed that 97 percent of Americans had oxybenzone in their blood. This chemical is absorbed into our system, and can stay there for an unknown period of time.

Physical sunscreens contain minerals that sit on the surface of the skin, and block out UV rays like a protective shield (often called sunblock). Physical sunscreens are not absorbed into the skin and body. Physical sunscreens have a whitish appearance, but micronized versions blend in easier and leave less of a white residue.

Safer Options

Read the labels carefully. Claims such as “dermatologist recommended” and “safe for kids” are not regulated.

- Choose physical sunscreens with zinc oxide and titanium dioxide.
- Choose sunscreens that block both UVA and UVB rays.
- Choose a sunscreen without fragrance, as some fragrances can act as hormone disruptors.
- Avoid products with oxybenzone, octinoxate, octocrylene, octyl-methoxycinnamate, and homosalate.
- Avoid products with vitamin A (or retinyl palmitate), which may actually increase your skin cancer risk.

For further information, or to see if your sunscreen is safe, go to the Environmental Working Group (EWG) website at <http://www.ewg.org/2014sunscreen>