

Professional

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BEAUTY

DHEA

hormone of eternal youth?

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at the flick of a switch

THE GOLDEN YEARS

age shall not weary us

PERFORMANCE ISSUES

procrastinate and pay



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Despite the success of the government's skin cancer prevention campaigns most Australians still have a lot of questions about the safety and effectiveness of sunscreen.

Dr Adam Sheridan provides some answers.

Sunscreen essentials

Spring it is the perfect time to think about Sunscreen. Sunscreens are an essential, non-negotiable component of all sensible skin care regimes. They provide reliable protection from the sun's damaging radiation; thereby preventing accelerated ageing and skin cancer formation. The result is healthy skin that maintains youthful qualities throughout life.

Dermatology patients understandably have many questions regarding this core product. Hopefully you will find some of our answers useful in your daily interactions with your clients.

1. 'Do I really need to wear a sunscreen every day?'

Yes. Like all preventative health measures (think brushing your teeth), sunscreen application must be performed daily, rain or shine. Nothing beats the combination of a broad-spectrum SPF 50+ UVA/UVB sunscreen, a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and sun smart behaviours — a moisturiser or cosmetic product containing an SPF is not enough.

A common misconception is that wintery, overcast days or indoors work precludes the need for sunscreen application. This is incorrect. Cloud cover and glass windows block UVB, but they do not block UVA and visible light. These wavelengths also cause significant skin damage. They contribute to skin cancer formation, accelerated ageing and create problems with uneven skin pigmentation and texture.

2. 'How do I balance being sun smart with maintaining my Vitamin D level?'

This is a frequent question, and a challenging balancing act in Australia. The sun's radiation is both the major cause of skin cancer and the best natural source of vitamin D. In Australia we need



to balance the risk of skin cancer with maintaining healthy vitamin D levels, to maintain good health.

The amount of sunlight you require to produce healthy vitamin D levels relates to a combination of factors including the prevailing UV level, your skin type, and your lifestyle. UV levels vary across Australia and throughout the year. Therefore, the amount of time you need to be in the sun to produce adequate vitamin D will vary according to your location, the season and the time of day.

Sun exposure exceeding base requirements does not result in an increased vitamin D 'store', but does increase your risk of skin cancer.

Brief sun exposure 'snacks', such as walking at lunchtime or to the shops, is the best way to safely acquire vitamin D. The amount of vitamin D produced also relates to the amount of your skin exposed to the sun — the more exposed, the more produced. During summer in southern Australia (Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Hobart and Perth), and all year round in the north (Brisbane and Darwin), a few minutes a day of sun exposure to an area of skin equivalent to your face, arms and hands is sufficient.

Daily exercise will also assist your body with the production of vitamin D.

Regular use of sunscreen day-to-day has not been shown to block vitamin D production.

3. 'Should I apply my sunscreen over or under my make-up?'

Give yourself a big tick just for using a sunscreen daily and don't stress too much regarding an exact order. In general we advise applying products in order of lightest to heaviest product, so this can help you decide the order to apply your current skincare regime. Be sure to apply your sunscreen at least 15 minutes before going outdoors to ensure it correctly binds to your skin and doesn't immediately evaporate or sweat away. Reapply when outdoors for prolonged periods and in harsh wind-swept environments (boating, skiing and swimming).

4. 'Does my dark skin mean I don't have to worry about sunscreen?'

This is a dangerous myth that beauty professionals should act to dispel. While it is true that darker skin types may prove more resilient in the sun, significant damage still occurs. Skin ageing accelerates, and the bane of all darker skin types — pigmented blemishes — increase in number. Fatal skin cancers may also arise (for example, Bob Marley died of melanoma of the toe). It is also important to remember that as the world becomes ever more interconnected, mixed race backgrounds are on the rise. It is therefore not uncommon for an individual with dark appearing skin to share the genetic susceptibilities of their paler forefathers and mothers.

5. 'Do sunscreens contain dangerous nanoparticles?'

The jury is still out on this question. There is no current evidence to suggest that quality Australian sunscreens contain nanoparticles in sufficient quantities to exert a negative biologic effect. Most such sunscreens contain 'microfine' particles which are larger than nanoparticles. Even if they did contain high concentrations of nanoparticles, it is unlikely that they could penetrate the outer barrier layer of the epidermis to reach underlying living cells upon which to exert an as yet to be determined negative effect. Microfine particles are used in products to reduce reflectance and to prevent the sunscreen 'finish' being too greasy or shiny.

6. 'I read somewhere that sunscreens cause skin cancer. Is this true?'

No. This myth stems from observational studies which showed higher rates of sunscreen usage in people who experienced higher rates of skin cancer. When you stop to think about it, this is only to be expected as those with outdoor lifestyles that place them at risk of skin cancer are more likely to try to reduce this risk with

regular sunscreen use — i.e. it is the lifestyle, not the protective behaviour that is the link.

7. 'Is sunscreen safe for my children?'

Absolutely. As long as a gentle child safe sunscreen is selected, application is entirely safe from the age of six months. Prior to this I recommend other forms of protection — shade, hats, protective clothing and swaddling. Apply sunscreen to all exposed areas and try to think ahead to where adults eventually display their damage: face, ears, neck, chest, legs and hands. Your children will thank you in the future for the healthy radiant skin you have gifted them.

If your child reacts to sunscreen, change to a product which only employs physical UV blocking agents such as titanium dioxide and zinc oxide, engage in gentle cleansing and moisturising and consult your doctor. The usual culprits are the fragrances, bases, preservatives and chemical UV absorbers in the sunscreen. Your dermatologist will offer specific advice on non-allergic alternatives and can arrange for allergy testing where appropriate. ■

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