

Sun & Sunscreen

Why we care

Sunny spring and summer days are a welcome break from the wet winter weather of the Pacific Northwest. But soaking up too much of that sunshine can have serious repercussions. Overexposure to sun can hasten aging of the skin and cause skin cancer. Just one blistering sunburn can double a child's lifetime risk of developing skin cancer. Sunscreen is one way to avoid sunburns, but studies show that some ingredients, such as oxybenzone, octinoxate, and retinyl palmitate, pose a health hazard to humans. Oxybenzone can also damage coral reefs and marine life. According to NPR, some 14,000 tons of sunscreen lotion ends up in coral reefs around the world every year.

Simple, positive steps

- Cover up. Shirts, pants, and wide-brimmed hats shield your skin from UV rays.
- Find shade. Picnic under a tree or use your own canopy.
- Plan around the sun. The sun is strongest between 10:00–2:00. Go outdoors in early morning or late afternoon when the sun is lower in the sky.
- Try zinc and titanium sunblocks. They cover both UVA and UVB rays while many chemical sunscreens only block a small portion of the ultraviolet spectrum.
- Avoid the following:
 - Sunscreens with the chemicals oxybenzone, octinoxate, and retinyl palmitate.
 - Spray sunscreens because the chemicals can be inhaled.
 - Super-high SPF sunscreens. These protect against burns but not necessarily damaging UVA rays.
 - Combined sunscreen/bug repellents. The combination may lead to increased skin absorption of the repellent ingredients.
- For more information, see [Environmental Working Group](#).

Questions or feedback? Contact Jeanne Roy at jeanne@earthleaders.org.