Sunscreen and Sunshine

By Dr. Alyssa Musgrove

It’s that time of year when we are exposed to the rays of the sun at the pool, on our beautiful lakes, getaway beach vacations and outdoor activities like golf or tennis. Reaching for sunscreen before spending time in the sun has become an automatic reaction for many of us. We have been taught sunscreen is a “must” if we want to prevent skin cancer, but is this really the case?

According to Alternative Articles on Health and Fitness, *“In recent years, we have been bombarded with reports on the dangers of the sun, and the need for sunscreen to protect ourselves from skin cancer. Sales of sunscreen and products containing sunscreen have skyrocketed; yet the incidence of skin cancer in the U.S. has tripled in recent years.”*

So that begs the question: If we are buying and using more sunscreen, why has skin cancer increased?

According to the FDA *“data fails to show that sunscreen use alone helps prevent premature skin aging and skin cancer.”* There is more to decreasing the risk for skin cancer than simply lathering on some lotion. The National Cancer Institute states that your risk of *“skin cancer is related to lifetime exposure to UV radiation.”* So, skin cancer prevention begins in childhood. As in all things, the earlier we begin, the less risk we have for disease.

Sunscreen use also has some other potential health risks. Many sunscreens contain harmful chemicals. A recent review of sunscreens by the Environmental Working Group states, “Our review…shows that some sunscreen ingredients absorb into the blood, and some have toxic effects. Some release skin-damaging free radicals in sunlight, some act like estrogen and disrupt hormones, and several can cause allergic reactions and skin irritation.”

According to Dr. Lauren Pickert, a biochemist, sunscreen chemicals such as such as Octyl-dimethyl-PABA, Benzophenone-3, Homosalate, Octyl-methoxycinnamate and 4-methyl—benzylidene camphor have been shown to cause free radical damage and can act like estrogens the body, disrupting the hormonal system. Other common chemicals in sunscreens shown to cause cancer are Dioxybenzone, Oxybenzone,Titanium Dioxide, bisphenol-A and PABA. These chemicals are all produced in a lab and are not natural to the body, so they become toxins in the body.

In addition to the toxic effect sunscreen can have on the body, sunscreen has also been shown to block the body’s ability to absorb Vitamin D, which is vital for our overall health. Our main source of Vitamin D is from sun exposure. In about 10 minutes you can absorb 10,000IU. Low Vitamin D levels have been linked to a variety of health problems including arthritis, cancer and depression. When we use sunscreen and block our body’s ability to get the Vitamin D we need, then our health can suffer. Vitamin D is helpful in preventing cancer, as well as improving the function of our immune system. It is also vital for good brain function, strong muscles and bones, and a healthy cardiovascular system. If you avoid the sun, get your vitamin D levels checked by your health care provider. A growing number of the population is deficient thanks to sunscreens and spending more time indoors.

Does all this mean we should never use sunscreen? Not necessarily. However, we should make wise decisions and healthy choices when it comes to the use of sunscreens and sun exposure. Here are some simple steps you can take:

1. Make sure to get at least 20 minutes of sunlight 5 days a week WITHOUT SUNSCREEN on arms, legs and face. Wear a hat and a shirt with sleeves once you have had adequate sun exposure in order to prevent sunburn.
2. Reduce your risk for oxidative damage by eating a healthy diet that includes lots of veggies and Omega 3 fats. Often when people burn easily and/or get sun poisoning, they are frequently deficient in calcium and essential fatty acids.
3. Choose a natural sunscreen. Some good brands are Aubrey Organics, Kiss My Face and Badger. You can go to the Environmental Working Group website [www.ewg.org/sunscreen/](http://www.ewg.org/sunscreen/) for 2017 EWG’s 11th annual guide to sunscreen safety ratings to help you make the right purchase.
4. When using a quality natural sunscreen, make sure to use it liberally and often, especially if you are in the water or sweating. Most people do not use enough sunscreen and can be overexposed to UVA/UVB, which can lead to skin cancer.
5. Consider making your own sunscreen that not only protects your skin from getting burnt but also nourishes and hydrates your skin with essential vitamins and nutrients. The following recipe is from Dr. Axe, who also sells high-quality pure essential oils (Numa brand) on his website.

**HOMEMADE SUNSCREEN**

Ingredients:

-10 drops lavender essential oil

-1 TBS pomegranate oil

-3/4 cup coconut oil

-2 tbsp Zinc Oxide powder

-2 tbsp shea butter

-glass jar

\*all ingredients can be found online (amazon) email pathwaysth@gmail.com for exact links\*

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients except zinc oxide in a jar.
2. Place a saucepan with 2 inches of water on stove over medium/low heat.
3. Place jar in saucepan and stir contents until ingredients start to melt.
4. Once all ingredients are combined, add in zinc oxide and stir well. Store in a cool place.

Note: This homemade cream has a long shelf life, it should be reapplied every 90 minutes if you get wet or sweat, or every 3-4 hours if you stay dry. Coconut oil has been shown to provide an SPF of about 8 and pomegranate oil SPF 20. The more zinc oxide used in your batch, the higher the SPF protection.