

Test Your SPF IQ

Are you staying safe in the summer sun?

When you think of summer, the first three letters that come to mind may be S-U-N. But before you go there, you should be thinking S-P-F. Find out how much you know about protecting yourself from the sun.

1. SPF stands for “sun protection factor.” What does a sunscreen’s SPF number indicate?

- The amount of sun the sunscreen will protect you from.
- How much time it would take to burn in the sun while using the product.
- How long the sunscreen will last after you apply it.

The correct answer is “b.” If you would typically burn in 30 minutes without sunscreen, using sunscreen with an SPF of 15 allows you to stay out 15 times longer. So multiply 15 times 30, and you can stay out for 7.5 hours (450 minutes).

2. How should a person decide what SPF level to use?

- If you want to stay outside longer, you should go with a higher SPF rating.
- The more easily you burn, the higher the SPF level should be.
- Based on how long you’ll be out in the sun, combined with your skin cancer risk.

The right answer is “c.” A higher SPF number means you can be in the sun longer without burning. But an SPF number that’s twice as high doesn’t mean it offers twice the protection. An SPF of 15 absorbs 93 percent of the sun’s UVB rays, while an SPF of 30 absorbs 97 percent. People of all skin types need sunscreen, and experts generally recommend an SPF of at least 30. If you’ve had skin cancer or precancer, a higher SPF is a good idea.

3. What else should you consider when choosing a sunscreen?

- Whether it provides broad-spectrum protection against both the sun’s UVB and UVA rays.
- Getting a more expensive brand.
- SPF is really all that matters.

The correct answer is “a.” There’s no evidence that more expensive sunscreen is better. And both UVA and UVB rays can harm your skin. UVA rays reach beyond the top layer of skin and are considered the most likely to increase your risk of skin cancer. UVB rays don’t penetrate as far, but can still cause skin damage.



4. Does the amount of sunscreen you apply make a difference?

- No. Just a quick swipe will do.
- Yes. You should slather it on heavily so you’re set for the day.
- Yes. You need to use enough to cover all exposed skin, and reapply it as needed.

The right answer is “c.” You need to use about a shot glass full to cover your body. Reapply sunscreen every two hours, and after swimming or sweating. Consider a waterproof brand for extra staying power.

HOW MANY QUESTIONS DID YOU ANSWER CORRECTLY?

- 4: You’re golden! (But your skin is well protected.)
 2–3: Not bad, but don’t get burned. Study up on SPF.
 0–1: You could use some SPF summer school.

FREE PODCAST

In this podcast, learn more about the ins and outs of sunscreen. Download it today at clevelandclinic.org/healthessentials.

