



The MRF's Sunscreen Position Statement

Melanoma is the deadliest form of skin cancer. Research suggests that nearly 90% of melanomas are caused by overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation, either from natural or artificial sources.^{1, 2} Despite this, finding accurate information about melanoma prevention, sunscreen and sunscreen safety can be challenging.

Some common misconceptions about sunscreen include:

- Using sunscreen increases your risk of getting melanoma
- Sunscreen is unsafe and causes cancer
- Regular sunscreen use prevents vitamin D absorption

Given these mixed messages, it is important that consumers are armed with facts that come from scientific research, not the opinions of people and organizations who want to create confusion.

A Comprehensive Approach to Skin Protection

Sunscreen is only one way to protect your skin from harmful UV exposure. We believe in a comprehensive approach to skin protection, including: sun avoidance especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., seeking shade whenever possible, wearing protective clothing such as long sleeves, pants, wide-brimmed hats and sunglasses, and applying broad spectrum SPF 30 sunscreen. Only sunscreens marked "broad spectrum" protect against both types of damaging UV radiation – UVA and UVB. Having an SPF value of 30 is critical to ensuring adequate protection in the sun.

Sunscreen and Melanoma

In 2011, the Journal of Clinical Oncology published a randomized, clinical study of over 1,600 people showing that regular sunscreen use reduced the incidence of melanoma by 50-73%. When used as directed with other sun protection measures, broad spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher helps prevent sunburn and reduces the risk of early skin aging and skin cancer (melanoma and squamous cell carcinomas) associated with UV radiation.³

Additionally, several scientific research studies disprove claims that sunscreen use increases melanoma risk. These comprehensive assessments of thousands of people found that sunscreen use does not, in fact, increase one's risk of developing melanoma.^{4, 5}

Sunscreen Safety

Over the years, a few controversies have developed regarding the safety of sunscreen. The safety of sunscreens has been studied in labs and on live subjects by reputable research scientists for many years. The results of these studies provide overwhelming evidence that sunscreens are safe and effective. No current published data has demonstrated adverse health effects on humans from the regular use of sunscreen.⁶

Sunscreen and Vitamin D

Vitamin D, which is produced in the skin after sun exposure, is known to improve bone health and reduce the risk of certain cancers. Getting an adequate amount of vitamin D is dependent on these three tactics: 1) eating foods that contain vitamin D, 2) taking a vitamin D supplement, and 3) getting a small amount of sun exposure.⁷ Please note: you do not need to tan or burn your skin to produce vitamin D.

UV radiation allows the body to create vitamin D, and some have suggested that sunscreen use makes it difficult to obtain adequate amounts of vitamin D. The fact is that large epidemiologic studies reflecting real life conditions prove clearly that sunscreen use does not cause vitamin D deficiencies.^{6, 9}

Adequate vitamin D can be obtained safely and cheaply through food and dietary supplements without the risks associated with overexposure to UV radiation.⁸ If you are concerned about your vitamin D levels, speak with your doctor.

The MRF thanks Steven Q. Wang, MD, Director of Dermatologic Surgery and Dermatology, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center at Basking Ridge, New Jersey, for his contribution of this content.

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