

Shade myths: How to really stay safe

August 21 2009, By Courtney Perkes

Slather on some SPF 30 sunscreen and you know your nose won't turn pink.

But how do you quantify sun protection that doesn't come in a labeled bottle? The nonprofit Skin Cancer Foundation Journal recently published an article on the sun protection factors of hats, beach umbrellas and shade trees.

We asked Dr. Dore Gilbert, a [dermatologist](#) at Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian, to weigh in with his realistic and common-sense advice for enjoying summer.

Broad-brimmed hats: SPF 5 for the nose, ears and neck.

Wearing the right hat is one of the best things you can do, said Gilbert, who gives community presentations on sun safety and skin cancer prevention. He recommends a "lifeguard hat" _ made from tightly woven straw with a wide brim. "That's probably going to block about 70 to 80 percent of the sun's rays at least. I go to Ralph's and I buy five or seven lifeguard hats. I never get sunburned wearing that. I always have the hat on when I'm working in my yard or I'm walking. I even keep one in the trunk of my car. I like the hat better than sunscreen."

Gilbert says a visor will only protect the forehead and a floppy Gilligan-style hat allows at least 50 percent of the sun's rays to bounce to the face. "You're not going to get the same amount of protection."

Umbrellas: SPF 3 to 10

A single umbrella on the beach offers limited protection because [ultraviolet rays](#) are reflected under the umbrella from the sand and water.

"If you're in an area where there's a lot of reflected light, you want to add a sunscreen to the umbrella or the hat," Gilbert said. "Most people if they sit under an umbrella they get much more protection than what that article says because it provides shade to the area that would be reflecting."

Shade trees: SPF varies.

Trees offer the best protection in the middle of the day when the sun is more directly overhead. If possible, choose a tree near other trees or buildings to block more of the sun. Dense foliage offers the best protection.

"It's like the hat tightly woven vs. loosely woven," Gilbert said. "Whenever I'm outdoors for a period of time I always look for shade. I don't even think about it anymore. I'll turn my back to the sun if I'm standing talking to someone."

Sunglasses: Choose a pair that blocks 99 percent of UVB rays and at least 95 percent of UVA rays. Polarized lenses contain a special filter that blocks reflected light, reducing glare.

"I never go outside without sunglasses," Gilbert said. "You want polarized lenses. It will give you some UVA and UVB coverage. From a cosmetic standpoint, it keeps you from squinting so you're less likely to develop crow's feet. Price doesn't matter."

Clothing: SPF from 4 to 30.

The journal recommends bright or dark clothing made from tightly woven fabrics.

Gilbert says a white long-sleeved shirt should provide an SPF of 4 to 6. "White is always the best to wear because it reflects the light. I try to wear long sleeved, white cotton shirts when I'm outdoors. Otherwise, I will put sunscreen on. Sometimes I'll do both, depending on what I'm doing."

Darker colors are more effective, but not realistic when it's hot outside, Gilbert says.

And finally what about specialty clothing designed to block UV-rays? "It's only necessary if you have a really bad history of skin cancer or you're really concerned about the sun's effect on your skin in terms of [skin cancer](#) or aging."

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