

Adding antioxidants to a sun protection plan

April 4 2014, by Katy Cosse

With winter finally in the rearview mirror, many people are making plans for fun outdoors. But don't stop at sunscreen and a hat for sun protection: a UC Health skin care specialist recommends adding another item to your daily routine.

Carrie Schuerfranz, RN, a clinical skincare nurse with UC Health, recommends what she calls the "power duo" for skin protection: vitamin C and sunscreen.

As an antioxidant, she says vitamin C has an important role in neutralizing free radicals in the skin. These unstable molecules in the skin are generated by UV rays, infrared radiation, and lifestyle factors like alcohol use and cigarette smoke.

"Over time, free radical damage leads to visible signs of accelerated skin aging, including fine lines, wrinkles, laxity, discoloration and even [skin cancer](#)," says Schuerfranz. "I like to give the visual of using [lemon juice](#) on sliced apples. As the lemon juice slows down the aging of the apple, [antioxidants](#) slow down the photoaging of our skin."

Antioxidants also can reduce inflammation and the effects of other damaging factors, including environmental pollutants, and internal and external stressors.

While antioxidants in food can help reduce inflammation within the body, Schuerfranz says that studies show topical application is the most effective way to deliver the benefits of antioxidants to the skin.

She recommends that patients look for a pharmaceutical-grade product containing L-ascorbic acid (vitamin C), preferably in a serum form, which she says is the most stable formulation.

If you are shopping for a sunscreen, Schuerfranz emphasizes seeking a broad-spectrum product that protects against UVA, UVB and high energy visible (HEV) rays—rays that penetrate more deeply into skin with the potential for greater long-term damage. It's best to stick to brands recommended by the Skin Cancer Foundation.

For the level of [sun protection](#) factor, or SPF, an SPF above 50 is preferred, though it's more important to apply (and reapply) appropriately rather than pick the highest SPF on the shelf.

Ultimately, Schuerfranz wants her patients to be informed about the best [skin care](#) regimen—"but live your life!" she says. "Get out and enjoy the season, just be smart about your sun exposure."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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