



## Sun Health in Otter Tail County

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As I am walking my dog around town, raking my yard or just sitting on my patio it makes me think about the joys of being outdoors. My mind wanders to sun health and realizes that many, including myself, need gentle reminders to respect the sun.

I practice as a family nurse practitioner at Lake Region Healthcare with a subspecialty in dermatology. Almost every office visit I will remind patients about sunscreen use and skin health. I would like to share these reminders with you as well and answer some common questions about sun protection.

1. **How do I pick out a sunscreen?:** The word broad spectrum should be on the label. This means you are protected from UVA rays that cause premature aging of the skin and UVB rays that protect you from burning.
2. **How old can you be to start using sunscreen?** The American Academy of Dermatology recommends 6 months of age as the start point for use of sunscreens. The sunscreen should only be applied to areas of the body not covered by clothing.
3. **What SPF number should I buy?** The American Academy of Dermatology suggests SPF (sun protection factor) 30 or higher. The FDA suggests a SPF of 15 but significant sun ray exposure still occurs. SPF 30 blocks 97% of the sun rays. No sunscreen, even those as high as 100 block all sun rays. The usual length of time that sunscreens work is 2 hours whether they are SPF 30 or 100. It is important to reapply sunscreens sooner after sweating and swimming.
4. **What is the difference between waterproof and water resistant sunscreens?** Water resistant sunscreen can last from 40-80 minutes but you need to look at the label for accuracy. "Waterproof" is very misleading so the FDA has banned this terminology.
5. **There are so many different forms of sunscreen. I look at the SPF and choose 30 but then cannot decide on spray, creams, gels etc?**
  - Creams are best for dry skin and the face.
  - Gels and lotions are good for hairy areas, such as the scalp or male chest.
  - Sticks are good to use around the eyes.

- Sprays are sometimes preferred by parents since they are easy to apply to children. Men may find it convenient to apply it to a balding scalp. Make sure to use enough of these products to cover the entire surface area thoroughly. Do not inhale these products or apply near heat, open flame or while smoking. It is important to note that current FDA regulations on testing and standardization do not pertain to spray sunscreens. The agency continues to evaluate these products to ensure safety and effectiveness.
  - There also are sunscreens made for specific purposes, such as for sensitive skin and babies.
6. **Do sunscreens outdate?** According to the American Academy of Dermatology, the FDA states that sunscreen lasts for three years. Check the expiration date on your sunscreen bottle and throw it away if it's outdated. If there is no expiration date, then the mark date you purchased it on bottle. Sunscreen should not be collecting dust at home as it is recommended to use year round. You can get terrible burns on cloudy days and winter days as well as during the summer months.
  7. **How do I apply the sunscreen and how often?** Use enough sunscreen to generously coat all skin that will be not be covered by clothing. For the average person applying to the full body takes one ounce of sunscreen. For reference, an ounce is equivalent to a shot glass filled. Apply the sunscreen to dry skin 15 minutes BEFORE going outdoors. Remember your lip balm and sunscreen should be SPF 30 or higher. Re-apply sunscreen approximately every two hours or after swimming or sweating heavily according to the directions on the bottle.
  8. **My vitamin D level is low so I need to get outdoors in the sun.** While vitamin D does come from the sun, it is recommended to get your requirements from foods and vitamins. If concerned please talk to your medical provider for guidance.
  9. **What should I look for in protective clothing?** Make sure that your protective clothing is tolerable. There are several skins on the market as well as long sleeve clothing. When picking a hat, make sure it is wide brimmed.

On a final note: your skin should be inspected by yourself or partner quarterly. Make sure you have your provider look at your skin during your physicals. I would be more than happy to do a skin exam on you and your family. Already, being here only a month, I have picked up on several skin cancers that patient's thought were nothing. Make your skin a concern at your next office appointment.

*Several of these items were taken from the American Academy of Dermatology web site for media purposes.*