Sunscreen

Dermatologists recommend sunscreen to prevent both skin cancer and age-related changes. Protection is particularly important if you take medications which can increase sensitivity to sunburn (such as lamotrigine; see list at end).

For medication sensitivity, a *Broad Spectrum* sunscreen product with good UV-A protection is best. Look for a sunscreen that contains at least one of the following: ecamsule, avobenzone, oxybenzone, titanium dioxide, sulisobenzone, or zinc oxide to protect against UV-A:

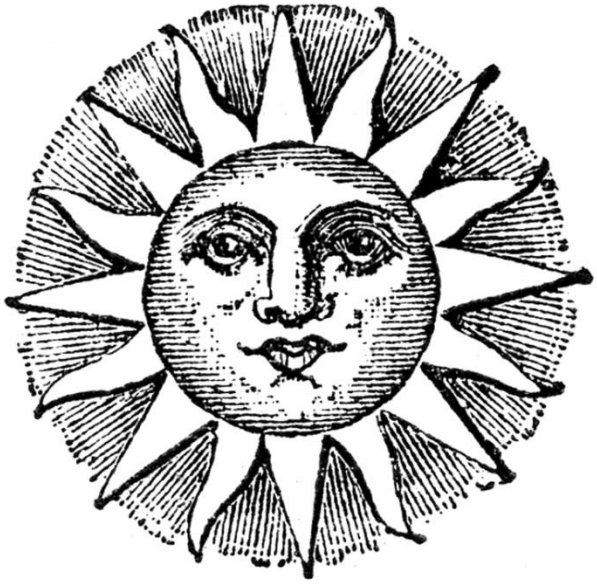
- *Ecamsule*. Found in L'Oreal's Anthelios SX products (expensive).
- *Avobenzone*. Found in Neutrogena's Helioplex, Active Photo Barrier Complex, Dermaplex.
- *Titanium dioxide or zinc oxide*. These are less expensive options for UVA protection.

Sunscreens are rated by SPF, an indicator of how long the protection will last. If you are fair-skinned and normally burn after 10 minutes, a SPF-15 product will protect you for 150 minutes (multiply 10 x 15). The actual time of protection will depend on your skin type and activity. All sunscreens will wear off after 2-3 hours. Water or sweat will wear it out faster, and you can buy water resistant products (they tend to last 40-80 minutes when swimming).

Sunscreen comes in many form. Lotions tend to provide the best protection. Sprays are convenient, but don't cover evenly. To get decent spray coverage, rub the spray in, then spray again and rub again. Avoid using sprays near the face (inhaling them can irritate the lungs).

Water- or alcohol-based gels are less greasy, but have fewer protective elements and a greater potential for irritation. Sticks are useful for sensitive areas near the lips, eyes or nose.

Sunscreen should be applied liberally (e.g. 2-3 tablespoons for most of your body) 15-30 minutes before going out in the sun (this allows time for the protective film to develop). It should be reapplied every two hours or after prolonged swimming or vigorous activity. Make sure to cover the back of the neck, the ears, and the areas of the scalp with thin hair. Pay attention to the expiration date as it loses effectiveness over time.



No sunscreen protects 100%, so some avoidance of the sun may be necessary. Try to avoid direct sunlight between 10am and 4pm and use shade and clothing for extra protection. For clothing, hats are most important. A hat with a wide (at least 4 inches out), circular brim can protect the face and neck. Special clothes are available to increase protection, such as the Solumbra line.

Key Points

1. Sunscreen is important for everyone, particularly those taking lamotrigine
2. Shop for *Broad Spectrum* and *SPF at least 30* (see back for recommended products; use SPF at least 50 if not using a recommended product)
3. Put on 15-30 minutes before going out in the sun; reapply ever 1-3 hours
4. Use shade, hats, clothing (Solumbra) and sunglasses

Sunglasses

Because UV lig ht can have harm the eyes, sunglasses also provide important protection. Look for lenses with one or more of the following:

- Block 99% or 100% of UVB and UVA rays

- Meet ANSI Z80.3 blocking requirements.
- UV 400 protection. (These block light rays with wavelengths up to 400 nanometers, which means that your eyes are shielded from even the tiniest UV rays.)

Polarized lenses can reduce the glare that comes from sun and water, but may make it more difficult to read electronic devices while wearing them. Yellow or rose tinted lenses can make it difficult to distinguish changes in traffic lights. Gray, green, and brown lenses minimize color distortion, and are a better choice when you'll be behind the wheel.

Children

The sensitive skin of babies and children is easily irritated by chemicals in adult sunscreens, so avoid sunscreens with para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA) and benzephenones like dioxybenzone, oxybenzone, or sulisobenzone. Children's sunscreens use ingredients less likely to irritate the skin, like titanium dioxide and zinc oxide. For kids 6 months or older, look for a sunscreen designed for children with an SPF of 15 or higher. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that babies under 6 months be kept out of the sun altogether.

Sunscreen for skin problems or allergies.

Consult with a dermatologist if you have skin problems that interfere with sunscreen. People who have sensitive skin or skin conditions like rosacea may benefit from sunscreens designed for children. Go for titanium dioxide or zinc oxide instead of chemicals like para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA), dioxybenzone, oxybenzone, or sulisobenzone. If you have skin irritation or allergies, avoid sunscreens with alcohol, fragrances, or preservatives.

Vitamin D

Regular sunscreen use can reduce the skin's ability to produce vitamin D. Low vitamin D can reduce bone strength, a risk particularly relevant to elderly individuals. Vitamin D levels can be tested and supplemented orally; a good starting dose is 600 IU daily (available over the counter); or 800 IU daily for persons over age 71.

Consumer Reports Ratings

Consumer Reports gave high marks to these sunscreens in 2017:

Top Lotions ($ = best buy):
La Roche-Posay anthelios 60 melt-in milk
Equate sports or ultraprotection (Walmart) $
Pure sun defense Disney Frozen $
Coppertone waterbabies or ultraguard
Ocean potion protect & nourish $
Aveeno protect + hydrate
Up & Up sheer dry-touch (Target)

Top sprays:
Trader Joe's spray SPF 50+ $
Banana Boat suncomfort clear ultramist
Equate sports continulus spray $
Neutrogena beach defense water/sun SPF 70

Top sticks:
Up & Up kids stick SPT 55 (Target)
Coppertone kids stick SPF 55

Consumer reports warned that 30% of the products they tested did not offer the protection they stated, so if you buy outside this list it's best to aim high on the SPF (50 or greater). Look for the actual product on the list, not just the brand. For example, Coppertone Sport high performance lotion did not test well, while their Waterbabies and Ultraguard products did.

Consumer reports also advised against "natural" products as they did not find any that offered full protection.

—Chris Aiken, MD, Updated 5/31/2017

Psych meds that increase sun sensitivity:

Lamotrigine.

Antipsychotics: risperidone / clozapine / chlorpromazine / fluphenazine / haloperidol / perphenazine / thioridazine / trifluoperazine.

Tricyclic antidepressants: amitriptyline / clomipramine / doxepin / imipramine / nortriptyline / protriptyline / trimipramine / desipramine / maprotiline / amoxapine