

Eczema and the sun factsheet

People with eczema are often concerned about protecting their skin from the sun and finding a sunscreen that does not irritate their eczema. Parents have particular concerns about protecting babies' and children's skin from the sun.

Some people find that their eczema improves with exposure to sunlight (this is particularly true of the contact and discoid types), while others experience a worsening of their condition.

Rarely, eczema is directly caused by exposure to ultraviolet light (sunlight). The term for this is 'photosensitive eczema'.

Certain drugs, chemicals and even plants can cause the skin to become sensitive to sunlight. If you develop eczema or your eczema becomes a lot worse after sun exposure, check with your healthcare professional to see if this could be due to your medication or some other cause.

Everyone should protect their skin from the sun all year round. The sun's rays can still penetrate in winter, but in the UK they are more harmful between March and October. Protect your skin too when you are enjoying winter sports such as skiing, since the sun's rays at high altitude and reflecting off snow can be very strong. Remember that the closer you are to the equator, the higher the UV radiation levels, so it is easy to burn even when there is cloud cover.

General advice on sun protection

The websites of Cancer Research UK and the British Association of Dermatologists are sources of up-to-date information on sun protection:

- www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/sun-uv-and-cancer
- www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/sun-awareness

The general principles recommended by the British Association of Dermatologists for sun protection are as follows:

- Slip on a shirt – wear sun protective clothing, hats and sunglasses
- Seek out the shade between 11.00am and 3:00pm. Keep babies and young children out of direct sunlight
- Slap on sunscreen. Use high protection SPF (minimum SPF30) with 4-5 UVA stars. Apply 15-30 minutes before going out, and every 2 hours after that.

Sunscreens that offer both UVA and UVB protection are ideal – these are sometimes labelled 'broad spectrum' sunscreens.

Sunscreen can be removed unintentionally by sweating, swimming or towel-drying. This is why regular application is recommended with **all** sunscreens, including those marketed as 'once-a-day' sunscreens.

Protecting skin with sunscreen

People with eczema and sensitive skin can react to all sorts of things, and finding a suitable sunscreen is a matter of trial and error. When choosing a sunscreen, you will need to consider the same things that you would consider when choosing an emollient (for example, it is recommended that you avoid fragrance and other ingredients that are commonly associated with sensitisation – see Tables on pages 3 and 4).

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Ingredient labels on products will help you avoid substances to which you have a known sensitivity, but you should always be careful and make sure you test any new sunscreen before applying it liberally. You can do this by dabbing a test area on the forearm before applying it to the whole body, just in case it causes a reaction or stings. It is recommended that you do this once a day for five days as sensitisation can take some time to develop. It is also recommended that you patch test sunscreens that you have used in the past, since the formulation – or indeed your skin – may have changed.

There are two types of sunscreen:

1. Chemical absorbers, which absorb UV radiation

2. Mineral-based reflectors (usually containing titanium dioxide), which reflect UV radiation.

Many people with eczema seem to find mineral-based sunscreens less irritating to their skin than chemical absorbers. However, titanium dioxide can leave a white sheen on the skin and this can be off-putting, particularly for people with darker skin.

As with all products used on the skin, what works for one person with eczema will not necessarily work for another.

Emollients and sunscreen

Sun exposure is drying to the skin. Try to apply your emollient about half an hour before applying sunscreen. This will prevent the sunscreen from becoming diluted by the emollient and will ensure that the sunscreen keeps its protective properties.

If you are using an emollient that is greasy or oily, be careful not to overdo application as this can cause a 'frying' effect in the sun.

Babies and young children should always use sun protective clothing with a built-in SPF50. This clothing is also available for adults who have sensitivity to sunscreen. Exposed areas of skin should still have sunscreen applied to them every 2 hours.

Practical advice and tips

- ▶ Buy new sunscreen every year and discard it after one year or before it has become contaminated or separated. Store sunscreen in a cool, dry place away from direct sunlight or, if on holiday, always keep it in the shade.
- ▶ Apply sunscreen generously for greater effectiveness – most people apply too little. Apply all over sun-exposed areas (the back and sides of the neck, temples and ears are commonly missed areas).
- ▶ Remember to reapply sunscreen every 2 hours during the day and after swimming, sweating and towel-drying.
- ▶ Avoid rubbing in sunscreen, as this may trigger itchiness. Apply it in smooth, downward strokes, as you would apply an emollient.
- ▶ Sunscreens come in a variety of formulations: creams, lotions, gels, sticks and sprays. As with emollients, choose the one that suits you the best and does not irritate your skin. Sprays are particularly useful for children.
- ▶ Nothing blocks 100% of the sun's rays, so you should wear protective clothing and a hat as well as applying sunscreen every 2 hours.
- ▶ Carry out a five-day self-patch test on sunscreens before you go on holiday.
- ▶ Leave a gap of around 30 minutes between applying an emollient and a sunscreen (apply emollient first). Without the application of sunscreen, emollient can cause a 'frying effect', which can include harmful burning.

Sunscreen product suggestions

Here are some examples of mineral-based, unfragranced products which seem to suit many people with eczema. This is not an exhaustive list:

- Isdin Fotoprotector Pediatrics Fusion Fluid Mineral Baby SPF50
- La Roche-Posay Anthelios range SPF50

- Mustela Very High Protection Sun Lotion SPF50
- SunSense Kids SPF50
- SunSense Sensitive SPF50
- SunSense Ultra SPF50
- Uvistat SPF30, SPF50

We do not recommend any one sunscreen, as what suits one person will not necessarily suit another.

Perfume / fragrance and fragrance allergens

International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) name	Other names / Trade names
Parfum	Perfume, fragrance
Amyl cinnamal	
Benzyl alcohol	
Cinnamyl alcohol	
Citral	
Eugenol	
Hydroxycitronellal	Hydroxy-citronellal
Isoeugenol	
Amylcinnamyl alcohol	Amyl-cinnamyl alcohol
Benzyl salicylate	
Cinnamal	
Coumarin	
Geraniol	
Hydroxyisohexyl 3-cyclohexene carboxaldehyde	Hydroxy-methylpentylcyclohexenecarboxaldehyde Lylal
Anise alcohol	Anisyl alcohol
Benzyl cinnamate	
Farnesol	
Butylphenyl methylpropional	2-(4-tert-butylbenzyl) propionaldehyde Lilial
Linalool	
Benzyl benzoate	
Citronellol	
Hexyl cinnamal	Hexyl cinnamaldehyde
Limonene	d-Limonene
Methyl 2-octynoate	Methyl heptin carbonate (MHC)
Alpha-Isomethyl ionone	3-Methyl-4-(2,6,6-tri-methyl-2-cyclohexen-1-yl)-3-buten-2-one
Evernia prunastri	Oak moss extract
Evernia furfuracea	Treemoss extract

Source: The Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association (CTPA) consumer website: www.thefactsabout.co.uk (Allergy advice section)

Preservatives

International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) name	Chemical name or common name	Trade name(s) examples
2-Bromo-2-nitropropane-1,3-diol		Bronopol
Diazolidinyl urea	Formaldehyde releaser	Germall II
DMDM hydantoin	Formaldehyde releaser	
Formaldehyde	Formaldehyde	
Imidazolidinyl urea	Formaldehyde releaser	Germall 115
Methylisothiazolinone	2-Methyl-4-isothiazolin-3-one Mi or MIT	
Methylchloroisothiazolinone and methylisothiazolinone	5-Chloro-2-Methyl-4-isothiazolin-3-one / 2-Methyl-4-isothiazolin-3-one	Kathon CG Euxyl K100

UV filters

International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) name	Chemical name or common name	Trade name(s) examples
Benzophenone-3	Oxybenzone	Eusolex 4360 Escalol 567 Uvinul M 40
Butyl methoxydibenzoylmethane	Avobenzone	Eusolex 9020 Parsol 1789
Ethylhexyl dimethyl PABA	FOctyl dimethyl PABA Padimate O	Eusolex 6007 Escalol 507 Uvasorb DMO
Ethylhexyl methoxycinnamate	Octinoxate Octyl methoxycinnamate	Eusolex 2292 Parsol MCX

Other

International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) name	Chemical name or common name	Trade name(s) examples
BHT	Butylated hydroxytoluene	
Colophonium	Colophony, rosin	
Lanolin (and derivatives)	Lanolin / wool alcohols	

Source: The Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association (CTPA) consumer website: www.thefactsabout.co.uk (Allergy advice section)

DISCLAIMER

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Factsheet last reviewed September 2019.

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