

Sun scream or sunscreen?

By ACSH Staff — June 18, 2015



Despite the old adage about what pots call kettles, we

would be remiss in our duties if we did not point out the arrogance of the title in a new [piece](#) ^[1] about sunscreen in *Time*: This Is the Only Sunscreen Article You Need to Read.

ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom says, When I start calling others arrogant, it is not unfair to wonder if I have clinched first place in the Hypocrite of the Year award. But in this case, it's not as bad as it seems. If *Time* is making such a grandiose claim, one would hope that the information they are providing is at least accurate. But it's not.

Much of the information in the article is accurate and helpful. For example, there is a difference between the two types of UV radiation, UVA and UVB. Although they are both harmful to skin and increase the risk of melanoma, UVA is harder to block; it is better at penetrating various materials, glass and sunscreen being two of them.

The article also points out that very few people understand what SPF (sun protection factor) actually means. The number is a measure of what percent of the radiation penetrates the block. Thus, a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 will (at least theoretically) allow one-fifteenth of UV radiation to penetrate the barrier (This means you get 93 percent protection). When the SPF is 70, that number goes up to about 98 percent. This highlights the (almost certainly intentional) confusion about the benefit of using products with very high SPF numbers.

Dr. Bloom says, People should understand that the numbers are far less important than using the screens regularly and properly. The difference between 50 and 70 is essentially irrelevant. These differences will be swamped by other factors, such as applying the screens properly and regularly, how much you sweat or whether you go swimming. An SPF of 30 is generally recommended. Just use it properly and don't worry about the number.

Time does just fine until you get to a [link](#) [2] in the article where they start talking about the worrisome ingredients that are found in sunscreens, especially those that disrupt the endocrine system. Here we go again.

Dr. Bloom says, Let s have a little quiz. When you read about long-used, safe chemicals that are being called endocrine disruptors, these scares come from a) The fountain of self-serving misinformation also known as the the Environmental Working Group; b) the equally bad NRDC; or c) a bunch of idiots which could be easily selected from either group. Answer tomorrow. As if you need it.

Is there no end to this silliness? Sure, let s worry about nothing and avoid sunscreens because scientifically ignorant and manipulative groups no doubt acting solely in their own self interest. Folks, we are here for a reason a term that was sadly lacking when *Time* went off the deep end of chemophobia.

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[1] <http://time.com/3924609/sunscreen-spf-uva-uvb/>

[2] <http://time.com/3883293/sunscreen-spf/>