

## ECZEMA AND THE SUN

### About this factsheet

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

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.

Some types of eczema are even directly caused or made worse by exposure to the sun, although this is rare. The term for this is photosensitive eczema.

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

Everyone should protect their skin from the sun's harmful rays. You need to do this not only during the British summer or on holiday in a warmer climate, but also if 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, too, 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

For the latest up-to-date advice on sun protection, you are advised to look at the Cancer Research website on sun protection, called SunSmart, which can be accessed at <http://sunsmart.org.uk>.

The general principles outlined by SunSmart for sun protection are as follows:

- ◆ Spend time in the shade between 11am and 3pm.
- ◆ Wear a t-shirt, hat and sunglasses.
- ◆ Use a sunscreen with at least factor 15 and a high star rating. Use it generously and reapply regularly.

A protection factor (SPF) of 15 blocks 93% of UVB (the burning rays) and SPF 30 blocks 96% of UVB. You should choose a product that also protects against UVA (the ageing rays) – often these are labelled 'broad spectrum' sunscreens.

### Protecting skin with sunscreens

People with eczema and sensitive skin can react to all sorts of things, and finding a suitable sunscreen will be a matter of trial and error. When choosing a sunscreen, you will need to consider the same things that you would when choosing an emollient (for example, it is recommended that you avoid fragrance and other ingredients that are commonly associated with sensitisation – see Tables 1 and 2).

Ingredient labels on products will help you to avoid substances to which you have a known sensitivity, but you should always be careful and make sure that you test any new sunscreen, in advance of going away, 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 creams that you have used in the past since the formulation, or indeed your skin, may have changed.

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There are two types of sunscreen:

1. Chemical absorbers, which absorb UV radiation.
2. Mineral-based reflectors (usually titanium dioxide), which reflect UV radiation.

Many people with eczema seem to find that mineral-based sunscreens are 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 skins.

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

Remember that although sunscreens provide protection when you are exposed to sunlight, they are not designed to allow you to spend unlimited time in the sun.

### Moisturisers used with sunscreens

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 a moisturiser that is greasy or oily, be careful not to overdo the application of the moisturiser as this can cause a 'frying' effect in the sun.

A better solution may be to use a UV sun suit to minimise the need for sun creams.

### Practical advice and tips

- ◆ Check the expiry date on the sunscreen. Nearly full bottles of opened sunscreen can normally be kept for a year, provided they are stored in a cool, dry place, away from direct sunlight, avoiding extremes of temperature and with the lid tightly closed. Discard sunscreen if there is only a little left or it has separated or been contaminated.
- ◆ Follow the instructions on the pack and apply the product generously – most people apply too little sunscreen for it to be effective.
- ◆ Remember to reapply sunscreen every 2 hours during the day and after swimming.
- ◆ Try not to rub too hard when applying sun cream as this will set off itching.
- ◆ Many children's sunscreens are now formulated as sprays, which makes them easier to apply.
- ◆ Nothing blocks 100% of the sun's rays, so you should also use protective clothing and hats as well as sunscreen.
- ◆ Do a five-day self-patch test on sunscreens before you go away.
- ◆ Leave a gap between applications of emollient and sunscreen to avoid diluting the sunscreen.
- ◆ To avoid 'frying', do not apply too much greasy emollient.

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### Sun screens – product suggestions

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

- ◆ E45 Reflective Sunscreen Sun Lotion SPF30
- ◆ La Roche-Posay Anthelios Spray SPF 50
- ◆ Nivea Sun Children's Pure & Sensitive Spray SPF50
- ◆ Soltan Sensitive Hypoallergenic Suncare Lotion SPF 30
- ◆ SunSense Sensitive SPF 50+
- ◆ SunSense Ultra SPF 50

The NES does not recommend any one sunscreen product as what suits one person does not necessarily suit another individual.

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**Table 1: The 26 fragrance ingredients considered more likely to cause reactions in susceptible people**

International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) name	Other names
Amyl cinnamal	
Benzyl alcohol	
Cinnamyl alcohol	
Citral	
Eugenol	
Hydroxycitronellal	hydroxy-citronellal
Isoeugenol	
Amylcinnamyl alcohol	amylcin-namyl alcohol
Benzyl salicylate	
Cinnamal	
Coumarin	
Geraniol	
Hydroxyisohexyl 3-cyclohexene carboxaldehyde	hydroxy-methylpentylcyclohexenecarboxaldehyde
Anise alcohol	anisyl alcohol
Benzyl cinnamate	
Farnesol	
Butylphenyl methylpropional	2-(4-tert-butylbenzyl) propionaldehyde
Linalool	
Benzyl benzoate	

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International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) name	Other names
Citronellol	
Hexyl cinnamal	hexyl cinnam-aldehyde
Limonene	d-limonene
Methyl 2-octynoate	methyl heptin carbonate
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 & Perfumery Association (CPTA)  
consumer website: [www.thefactsabout.co.uk](http://www.thefactsabout.co.uk) (Allergy advice section)

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**Table 2: Examples of cosmetic ingredients more associated with sensitisation**

International Nomenclature of Cosmetic Ingredients (INCI) name	Chemical name or common name	Trade name(s) examples
Formaldehyde	formaldehyde	
2-Bromo-2-nitropropane-1,3-diol DMDM hydantoin Imidazolidinyl urea Diazolidinyl urea Quaternium-15	formaldehyde releasers	Bronopol Germall 115 Germall II Dowicil 200
Methylchloroisothiazolinone and methylisothiazolinone blend		Kathon CG Euxyl K100
Lanolin (and derivatives)	lanolin / wool alcohols	Amerchol L101
Methylparaben Propylparaben	parabens methyl 4-hydroxybenzoate propyl 4-hydroxybenzoate	
Parfum	perfume, fragrance	
Colophonium	colophony, rosin	
Tosylamide/formaldehyde resin	toluene sulfonamide formaldehyde resin	Santolite Resin
p-Phenylenediamine	PPD	
p-Toluenediamine	PTD	
BHT	butylated hydroxytoluene	
Benzophenone-3	oxybenzone	Eusolex 4360
Butyl methoxydibenzoylmethane		Eusolex 9020 Parsol 1789
Octyl dimethyl PABA		Eusolex 6007
Ethylhexyl methoxycinnamate		Eusolex 2292 Parsol MCX
Resorcinol		Jarocol RL Rodol RS

Source: The Cosmetic, Toiletry & Perfumery Association (CPTA)  
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The National Eczema Society is a registered charity in England and Wales (number 1009671) and in Scotland (number SCO43669) and is a company limited by guarantee (registered in England, number 2685803). Office: 11 Murray Street, LONDON, NW1 9RE.

- ◇ We are dedicated to improving the quality of life for people with eczema and their carers.
- ◇ Eczema affects FIVE MILLION children and adults in the UK every year.
- ◇ ALL our information is clinically evidence based and written by or verified by dermatology experts.
- ◇ The National Eczema Society receives no Government or Health Service funding, relying entirely on voluntary income from the general public, Companies and Trusts.

### DISCLAIMER

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