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How should someone choose between chemical vs mineral sunscreen?

This depends on your skin type and preferences as a consumer. Both mineral and chemical sunscreens offer sun protection, but in different ways. Mineral sunscreens use a physical block, like zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, to create a barrier on the skin's surface and reflect UV rays. They begin to work the minute you apply them and are generally considered reef-safe (as in, they won't harm ocean life if using the product while swimming in the sea). Chemical sunscreens work differently in that they're formulated with ingredients like oxybenzone, octinoxate, and avobenzone, which absorb UV rays and convert them to heat. For this reason, I typically recommend patients with melasma or other skin conditions that are exacerbated by heat to use mineral sunscreens over chemical ones. People with sensitive skin are also likely to tolerate mineral formulations better over chemical ones. That said, some mineral sunscreens are known to leave a white cast, especially on deeper skin tones.

Mineral filters, which create a physical barrier on the skin with inorganic compounds like zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, are generally more gentle than chemical sunscreens. As mentioned above, individuals with sensitive skin types may tolerate formulas with a mineral sunscreen over a chemical sunscreen. Since chemical sunscreens work by absorbing UV radiation, converting it to heat and dissipating it, individuals with melasma or rosacea (skin conditions that are often worsened by heat) should also consider using mineral sunscreens over chemical formulas. Lastly, for those who are environmentally conscious, mineral sunscreens are considered reef safe.

Do you have any tips on using sunscreen? Are there common application mistakes you want people to know about?

The biggest mistake I see is simply not applying enough product to provide adequate sun protection. The face alone requires 1 teaspoon to provide sufficient coverage, and requires reapplication every 2 hours if you plan to be outdoors. Don't forget to apply the product to the back of your ears and neck, which most people miss.

What's the difference between facial sunscreen and body sunscreen?

Both offer sun protection, but are formulated differently for a better consumer experience. For example, facial sunscreens are often available in non-comedogenic and/or more gentle formulas ideal for facial skin or have a thinner consistency that layers better under makeup. Many facial sunscreens are also formulated with added benefits for facial skin, including ingredients like niacinamide, ceramides, hyaluronic acid, and more. For these reasons, you'll find facial sunscreens are typically more expensive per ounce. Body sunscreens are likely to have a thicker consistency and are meant to have more staying power as they're meant to last through outdoor activities.

What are your tips for choosing a sunscreen for the face, such as ingredients to look for, considerations for skin type and tone, etc.?

The sunscreen category has really blossomed in the past few years and it's easy to find sophisticated formulas with a range of added skincare benefits at all price points. First, I always recommend choosing a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher. Second, understand what your skin type/needs are and try to choose a formula that can help address these issues. For example, people who suffer from redness may want to opt for a sunscreen formula with niacinamide, which helps calm inflammation. Those with drier skin types should look for sunscreen formulas with hyaluronic acid and ceramides. If you're acne prone, looking for a non-comedogenic formula is key. Lastly, the best sunscreen formula is the one you're more likely to use daily - this is where elements like fragrance and the way the product feels sitting on the skin may come into play.

When choosing a sunscreen, are there any ingredients to avoid, such as fragrance, parabens, oxybenzone, etc.?

Generally, I recommend staying away from products with parabens and phthalates. If you're sensitive or allergic to fragrance, it's best to opt for unscented products.

As for ingredients you should avoid, this depends on your skincare needs. Those with acne-prone skin should avoid formulas with comedogenic ingredients, whereas sensitive skin types should avoid chemical sunscreens, parabens, sulfates, and other potential irritants.

What are your tips for using facial sunscreen?

In addition to using a broad-spectrum formula of SPF 30 or above, you'll want to make sure you're applying enough to your face and neck. The general rule of thumb is a teaspoon or nickel-sized amount for your face and neck - and don't forget to apply to areas like the ears, the upper eyelids, and the back of your neck. If you'll be outdoors, remember to reapply every 2 hours.

What are the best face sunscreens on the market and why?

ColoreScience Sunforgettable brushes for oily skin. They absorb oil and provide excellent mineral-based sunscreen protection.

EltaMD UV Daily Broad-Spectrum SPF 40 for dry skin. I'm a big fan of EltaMD's entire line and use their sunscreen products in my routine regularly. This lightweight formula is hydrating, comfortable to use, and layers really well under makeup.

Elta MD UV Daily deep tint for darker skin tones.

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What criteria should someone look for when buying a sunscreen, such as ingredients to look for or avoid?

The best sunscreen to choose is truly “the one you will use” consistently. I recommend at least an SPF 30 or more, and I gravitate towards sunscreens that also contain physical (or mineral) filters such as zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide.

I like added ingredients such as hyaluronic acid and niacinamide for added hydration and brightening/calming effects respectively. Some sunscreens are targeted to help mattify the skin and will share this on the label, with ingredients such as silica or dimethicone.

Someone doesn't necessarily need to avoid ingredients like fragrance unless that person has a known allergy or sensitivity to any ingredients.

How should someone choose between chemical vs mineral sunscreen?

Both options are great, and they are often combined together. Chemical filter based sunscreens tend to have a more elegant application, meaning they rub in easily and well, and generally do not leave a white cast.

The best sunscreen is the one that someone will actually wear, whether that is physical or chemical or a combination. Most cosmetically elegant options are often a combination of the two. Those who have particularly sensitive skin sometimes tolerate mineral sunscreens better.

Do you have any tips on using SPF? Are there common application mistakes you want people to know about?

Be sure to apply an adequate amount of sunscreen to your face which is 1/4 of a teaspoon or 2 finger lengths. The most common application mistake is not applying enough. Another mistake is missing key sun-exposed areas such as tops of ears, neck, chest, and tops of hands. Don't forget to apply your SPF to these areas as well. Apply SPF as the last step (unless wearing makeup, then this will go last).

What are your favorite face sunscreens on the market and why?

CeraVe AM Facial Moisturizing Lotion with SPF 30: My favorite combination product and the one I frequently recommend for patients who struggle with acne. I love how it contains hyaluronic acid as well as calming niacinamide, not to mention the key essential ceramides found in CeraVe products that are great for the skin barrier.

EltaMD UV Daily: A favorite amongst acne patients. It is made to help calm acne-prone skin. It contains niacinamide, hyaluronic acid, and vitamin E. Created with hyaluronic acid Vitamin E (antioxidant), this is a fan favorite for being effective, cosmetically elegant and free of parabens, fragrance, and dyes. It is oil-free and hypoallergenic.

CeraVe Hydrating Sheer Sunscreen SPF 30: A combination mineral and chemical sunscreen that also contains hyaluronic acid, niacinamides, and ceramides for extra moisturization. It feels very light on the skin and is not greasy.

La Roche-Posay Anthelios Tinted Sunscreen SPF 40+: I love how this brand provides various tinted shade options to help minimize the sunscreen white cast that can be seen on more pigmented skin. This is a completely mineral sunscreen and very good for sensitive skin.

Blue Lizard Mineral Sunscreen SPF 50: This purely mineral sunscreen is a fan favorite amongst adults and children. It is hypoallergenic, reef-friendly, and gently soothes and moisturizes skin with aloe vera.

Neutrogena Clear Face Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 50: A fan favorite for a light, mattifying, oil-free option that is particularly ideal for acne-prone skin.

What's the difference between facial sunscreen and body sunscreen?

Facial sunscreens tend to be lighter, oil-free, and non-comedogenic. They are more cosmetically elegant and go well under make-up if desired. Body sunscreens are often thicker, better for longer outdoor exposure, and do better with swimming and sweating (choosing water- and sweat-resistant options).

What are your tips for using facial sunscreen?

Apply a thick layer every day, regardless of expected sun exposure. Even driving in your car or a short walk emits UV rays. Sunscreens do not block UV light completely but help reduce the skin's exposure.