Sunscreen Alternatives

We all know that the sun can be damaging in many ways, but most sunscreens on the market have some questionable, if not dangerous, ingredients. Here are a few ways to play it safe in the sun without putting your health at risk.

1. Common Sense
We all know it but often forget: Avoid midday (10 am-2 pm) sun as much as possible, stay in the shade when possible, wear sunglasses and sun hats, don’t stay out exposed for too long.

2. Cover Up!
For short periods, especially early or late in the day, sunscreen may not be necessary. In fact, a little exposure every day is vital to keep our Vitamin D levels up! Instead cover the skin with lightweight, tightly woven clothing, and protect your face with a hat. Babies under 6 months especially need to be covered up, since they don’t yet have the protection of melanin.

3. Be a Label Reader
Not all sunscreens are created equal. The “worst” chemicals to avoid include Oxybenzone and PABA/Padimate O. Some active ingredients that have been found less toxic include Titanium Dioxide and Zinc Oxide.

4. California Baby
This very eco-friendly company makes three of the top ten sunscreens on Environmental Working Group’s “Low Health Hazard/Low Sun Hazard/Most Effective” list: the SPF 30+ No Fragrance Sunblock Stick, the SPF 30+ Everyday Sunblock Stick, and the SPF 30+ Everyday Lotion. They are widely available and reasonably priced.

5. Homemade
There are many recipes out there for DIY sunscreen. Here’s one to try: In a double boiler over medium heat, mix 2 ½ oz sesame oil, 1 ½ oz coconut oil, and 1 ½ oz beeswax. Remove from heat and add 4 oz distilled water, mix with electric mixer until thick and smooth. Add 2 Tbsp zinc oxide and 1 Tbsp wheat germ oil, pour into glass jar and allow to set. (See resources for links to this and more).

6. Eating Prevention
Because of their antioxidant properties, carotenoids (beta-carotene), consumed naturally in many fruits and vegetables (especially carrots and apricots), or taken as a supplement, may help the body fend off sunburn and its accompanying damage. Green Tea also has strong antioxidant properties that may protect the skin.

Compiled by the HMN Green Mama Team, May 2008

Sources: