

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

Sun-Protective Clothing: Wear It Well

According to the American Academy of Dermatology, more than 1 million people will be diagnosed with cases of skin cancer this year in the United States. Applying sunscreen and limiting your sun exposure can reduce your risk for skin cancer. So can wearing sun-protective clothing.

It's important to understand the labeling information on sun protection products and shop carefully before heading to the beach, tennis court or park. The Federal Trade Commission carefully monitors advertising claims in this area and offers this information to help you make wise purchasing decisions.

Sun-protective fabrics differ from typical summer fabrics in several ways. Sun-protective fabrics typically have a tighter weave or knit and usually are darker in color. Garments made with these fabrics may have a label listing the garment's Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) value, that is, the level of protection the garment provides from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays. **The higher the UPF, the higher the UV protection.**

The UPF rating indicates how much of the sun's UV radiation is absorbed by the fabric. For example, a fabric with a UPF rating of 20 allows 1/20th of the sun's UV radiation to pass through it. This means that the fabric would reduce your skin's UV radiation exposure by 20 times *where it's protected by the fabric*.

There are three categories of UPF protection:

- A UPF between 15 and 24 provides "Good UV Protection;"
- A UPF between 25 and 39 provides "Very Good UV Protection;" and
- A UPF between 40 and 50 provides "Excellent UV Protection."

Garments with a rating above UPF 50 may be labeled UPF 50+; however, they may not offer substantially more protection than those with a UPF of 50. Also, a garment shouldn't be labeled "sun-protective" or "UV-protective" if its UPF is less than 15. In addition, sun-protective clothing may lose its effectiveness if it's too tight or stretched out, damp or wet, and worn and washed repeatedly.

You may see labels on sun-protective garments stating that the garment meets standards developed by the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM). ASTM is just one organization that has developed a standard guide for the testing and labeling of UV protective fabrics. While manufacturers don't have to comply with the ASTM standard guide, those that say they do must label their garments with UPF values.

Tips for Sun Safety

Here are some other ways to make working and playing outdoors sun-safe.

- **Wear sunglasses** to reduce sun exposure that can lead to cataracts and other eye damage.
- **Wear a wide-brimmed hat** to protect your eyes, ears, face and the back of your neck — areas that are prone to overexposure to the sun.

- **Use sunscreen before** you go out, and reapply every two hours if you've been perspiring or swimming. Even waterproof sunscreens can come off when you towel off sweat or water. **Be aware** that children under six months of age should **never** have sunscreen applied to their skin; they can be protected by avoiding time outdoors.
- **Try to avoid the midday** sun when the sun's UV rays are strongest.
- **Pay attention to the UV Index**, which provides a forecast of the expected risk of overexposure to the sun and indicates the degree of caution you should take when working, playing or exercising outdoors. The UV Index predicts exposure levels on a scale of 0 to 10+. A 0 indicates a low risk of overexposure; 10+ means a very high risk of overexposure.

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint, or to get free information on any of 150 consumer topics, call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357), or use the complaint form at www.ftc.gov. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.