How Much Clothing Really Protects Us From The Sun

The sun is one of the most important forces in this world, and it is one of the most deadly. More than 90% of skin cancer is caused by sun exposure. It is the most common type of cancer, with over one million new cases each year, and it accounts for more than 50% of all cancers combined. Some can be treated, but others result in death. Although the risk factor for African Americans, Latinos, and Asians is low, it is most deadly for these groups. 1 in 5 Americans will be diagnosed in their lifetime with skin cancer, whereas 1 in 3 Caucasians will receive the diagnosis. Every hour, one person dies from skin cancer. All these statistics are very startling, but what's most shocking is that most of these deaths could have been prevented through proper protection from the sun. It is important to understand how to protect ourselves from the deadly rays of the sun.

What is SPF?

SPF stands for Sun Protection Factor. It is calculated by the amount of light that induces redness in sunscreen-protected skin, divided by the amount of light that induces redness in unprotected skin. The higher the SPF, the more protection a sunscreen offers against UVB rays, which are those that cause sun burn. The SPF tells you how long you can stay in the sun without getting a sun burn. For example, if you can normally stay in the sun for thirty minutes without burning and you are wearing a sunscreen with an SPF of 15, you can now stay in the sun for 450 minutes without burning, although it is not recommended to have that much exposure to the sun.

UV Protection in Fabrics

UPF is a term that describes the sun protection provided by fabrics, and it indicates the level that a fabric can block UV rays. It is very similar to SPF, and sometimes is used interchangeably. Most sun block fabrics start with a UPF of 30 and go up, and they remain consistent whether wet or dry. So if you choose not to buy clothing with sun blocking protection, you can choose to wear clothing that is tightly woven, such as denim. Polyester is also known to have a high protection factor against UV light. Fabrics with a tighter, denser weave, in dark colors, with a matte or dull finish provide the best protection from UV rays. Knits give poor protection because the UV rays pass right through the loops. Examples of common items and their SPF ratings include:

- Nylon Stockings - SPF 2
- Hats - SPF 3-6
- Summer-weight clothing - SPF 6.5
- Denim jeans - SPF 95-100

Recap

- Tightly woven fabric provides greater protection than loosely woven clothing. If you can see light through a fabric, UV rays can get through, too.
- Dark colors provide more protection than light colors by preventing more UV rays from reaching your skin.
- Clothing with less stretch generally has better UV protection
- Always wear sunscreen or sun protective clothing, and try to limit exposure to the sun.

College of Agricultural, Family and Consumer Sciences

Division of Family and Consumer Sciences
102 Pinkie Thrift Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70813

Phone: 225-771-4660
Fax: 225-771-2400
http://www.subr.edu