

The ABCs of UV: A Glossary of Terms

Ultraviolet: Ultraviolet (UV) light is invisible energy given off by the sun. UV is divided into three levels: UVA, UVB, and UVC.

UVA: The longest wavelength (320-400 nanometers) of UV. It can penetrate the skin's deeper layers, is thought to play a major part in aging, wrinkling, and developing skin cancers.

UVB: The middle-range of UV (290-320 nanometers). UVB rays are responsible for burning, tanning, and accelerating aging. They also play a key role in the development of skin cancer. UVB's intensity varies by season, location, and time.

UVC: The shortest and highest-energy UV with wavelengths less than 290 nanometers. UVC is filtered by the ozone and does not reach the earth's surface.

SPF: Sun Protection Factor. The sunscreen SPF rating is calculated by comparing the amount of time

needed to produce a sunburn on sunscreen-protected skin to the time needed to cause a sunburn on unprotected skin.

Physical blocker: Insoluble particles that absorb and reflect UV away from the skin. These are better for people with sensitive skin. Inorganic sunscreens such as metal oxides.

Chemical blocker (Absorber): Of the 16 FDA-approved ingredients for sunscreen, most fit into this category of organic UV filters. They protect by forming a thin, protective film on the skin's surface and absorbing the UV radiation before it penetrates the skin. The drawback is that they can irritate the wearer's skin.

Water-resistant: A product that can provide protection for 40 minutes even while the wearer is swimming or sweating.

Waterproof: A product that protects for 80 minutes while wearer is swimming or sweating. The FDA doesn't endorse the term "waterproof." Instead it uses "very water resistant."