

A Little Crispy Around the Edges

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About 20 years ago, my brother-in-law invited me to play in a volleyball tournament. The tourney took place at scenic High Cliff State Park, and we had a blast (and even won a few games!). Because I was responsible, I covered myself with sunscreen.

The games were played on grass, however. Because of all the running and jumping, the grass soon flattened and became slippery. I took off my shoes and was far more successful. At the end of the day, though, as I went to put my shoes back on, I noticed my feet were glowing and red like fresh lava out of a volcano. Apparently I forgot to put sunscreen on the tops of my feet.

From that day on, I have been very diligent in caking myself in sunscreen. Unfortunately, my kids also inherited my lack of pigmentation (my Dad's nickname is Whitey, which doesn't bode well for getting too bronze). Accordingly, I always make sure they're slathered in sunscreen, too.

Because we go through sunscreen so quickly, I'm often running to the store to restock. There are literally shelves upon shelves of different varieties of sunscreen. To be safe, I just buy the kind with the highest Sun Protection Factor, or SPF number. One time I'm pretty sure I actually bought a tube full of caulk.

Thanks to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, I'll soon hopefully have an easier time picking out sunscreen. The FDA recently announced that it will be implementing new rules for labeling sunscreen products to help Americans reduce their risk of skin cancer and wrinkles.

The FDA is also implementing new testing regulations to determine whether a sunscreen is "broad spectrum," meaning it protects against both ultraviolet A and B rays. UVA rays are the primary cause of skin cancer and premature aging, while UVB rays can cause severe sunburn.

A sunscreen's SPF number correlates to the length of time a sunbather can catch rays before reapplying. To be sold as sun protection, sunscreens that have SPF values between 2 and 14 must be labeled as Broad Spectrum and protect against UVA and UVB rays. If a product is labeled as Broad Spectrum and has an SPF of 15 or higher, it may be marketed as reducing the risk of skin cancer and early skin aging, if used as directed.

Products that do not protect against UVA and UVB or those that are considered Broad Spectrum but have an SPF less than 15 will be required to have a warning stating that the product has not been shown to help prevent skin cancer or early skin aging. In addition, I will no longer be able to buy SPF 300 sunscreen; products will no longer have a label higher than SPF 50, but will instead be identified as SPF 50+ because the FDA does not have enough information proving that products with SPF numbers higher than 50 provide any additional sun protection.

Finally, sunscreen labels must inform consumers how long they can wear a "water resistant" product while either swimming or sweating before they lose protection. In addition, sunscreens can no longer be marketed as waterproof or sweat-proof or be identified as a "sunblock." The new rules will likely go into effect next year.

In an effort to be safe, I will routinely suggest that my wife wear a bikini so that I can help apply sunscreen on her. Just to be safe.