

## Boomer Health: Have fun in sun - and use sunscreen

By **STEVE DORFMAN**

I'm not a big fan of the sun. Never have been. Call me crazy, but I prefer overcast skies to brilliant blue ones. As a fair-skinned, lifelong South Floridian, I've always had a healthy respect for the sun's power to harm.

Unlike my dad, who was an avid sun worshiper in the coconut-oil era of sunbathing (and who had dozens of basal-cell carcinomas to prove it), I make sun protection a top priority whenever I'm active outdoors.

No, I don't slather up for the walk from the front door to the car door. But for my weekend tennis outings or daytime runs, I apply (even on my preferred "vanilla sky" days) copious amounts of ultraviolet A and B spray-on "sport" sunscreens that promise to remain in place no matter how much I sweat.

Since I haven't suffered a sunburn in decades, I figured I was doing the right thing. So I can relate to the dismay that countless AOL News followers felt last week upon reading a health report that led with these ominous words:

"Almost half of the 500 most popular sunscreen products may actually increase the speed at which malignant cells develop and spread skin cancer because they contain vitamin A or its derivatives."

The story goes on to say that "only 39 of the 500 (sunscreens) examined were considered safe and effective to use." The story is based exclusively on the findings of researchers at the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

Before we examine the legitimacy of these concerns, a few words about EWG. To call EWG an advocacy group is putting it mildly. A brief visit to the organization's website ([www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)) will leave you thinking that everything under the sun can either kill you or irreparably harm the environment.

As EWG promises, "Our research brings to light unsettling facts that you have a right to know." (Don't the group's researchers ever make positive findings?)

"Every year around this time, EWG releases a negative report about sunscreens, which winds up confusing and panicking our patients," says **Dr. Marta Rendon**, a Boca Raton dermatologist.

Rendon says the study that EWG cites (and which the U.S. Food and Drug Administration denies having conducted) was supposedly done by the FDA a decade ago and, in essence, says that vitamin A might have sped up the incidence of cancerous cells in sun-exposed lab animals.

However, "Numerous studies since then have shown the benefits of vitamin A in reversing the effects of sun damage," Rendon notes. "There's overwhelming evidence to contradict EWG's warnings."

As for EWG's stance that less than 10 percent of the 500 sunscreens it examined were safe to use: This is because of what it calls "exaggerated SPF claims"; in addition, according to EWG, the products contain a chemical called oxybenzone, which the group said is a "hormone-disrupting compound that penetrates the skin and enters the bloodstream."

No evidence was cited to show why oxybenzone is harmful, but EWG recommends using only sunscreen products that "contain either zinc or titanium minerals."

Good luck finding the obscure brands that EWG deems safe.

Rendon believes that much of what EWG is purporting about sunscreens is overly alarmist. She urges that "everyone continues taking proper measures to protect their skin against sun damage. That includes using a broad-spectrum sunscreen that includes both UVA and UVB protection."

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