

# Does Makeup With SPF Actually Protect Your Skin from the Sun?

Foundations and tinted moisturizers often contain SPF, but dermatologists say that's probably not enough.



By [Korin Miller](#) May 6, 2019



With warmer weather well on its way, you'll want to do everything you can to protect your skin from the sun's harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays—and applying makeup with SPF seems like the simplest way to do that. You'll save time by skipping a step and protect your skin while perfecting it...right?

It's a little confusing: Does using a foundation or tinted moisturizer with SPF really protect you as much as using actual sunscreen—or is it still leaving you exposed?

While these products *can* help protect your skin, they're still not as effective as using a traditional sunscreen, says Doris Day, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in New York City and author of *Beyond Beautiful*. Here's why, plus how to make sure your skin actually is protected when you step outside.

## Is makeup with SPF a legit form of sunscreen?

Technically yes, Dr. Day says. Anything with an SPF label should follow guidelines set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), she says. All sunscreens (and products that contain sunscreen) have to be tested according to an SPF test procedure, the FDA explains on its website.

The test measures the amount of UV exposure it takes to cause a sunburn when a person is using a sunscreen compared to how much UV exposure it takes to cause a sunburn when they don't use a sunscreen. The product is then labeled with the appropriate SPF value. Here's how those values break down in terms of sun protection:

- SPF 15 blocks 93 percent of UVB rays
- SPF 30 blocks 97 percent of UVB rays
- SPF 50 blocks 98 percent of UVB rays
- SPF 100 blocks 99 percent of UVB rays

So technically, a foundation that contains SPF 20 should provide pretty decent protection compared to no sunscreen at all. But here's where things get tricky: In order for your sunscreen to be truly protective, you need to apply enough of it—or a nickel-sized dollop to your face alone, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation.

"These makeup products are sunscreens," Dr. Day says. "But the problem is that people apply them as moisturizer or foundation, which means they don't apply the same amount used in testing. They're not using enough."

That's because most people tend to apply makeup products with a lighter hand to avoid a heavy (aka cakey) finish, says Joshua Zeichner, MD, director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City.

Foundations and tinted moisturizers also have a thinner consistency than sunscreens, so it's likely that you're getting a thinner coating of protection than you would if you used a regular face sunscreen, Dr. Day says.

## The most effective way to use makeup with SPF

If you're going about your day and will likely be spending most of it indoors, using makeup that contains SPF can provide some protection, says **Gary Goldenberg, MD**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital. "However, these products usually aren't strong enough for the beach, pool, or athletic outdoor activities," he says. In those cases, he recommends using a broad-spectrum sunscreen that has a strong physical blocker, like zinc oxide, and an SPF 30 or higher.

While some protection is better than none, the best way to use your foundation or tinted moisturizers with SPF is to apply sunscreen underneath them, Dr. Goldenberg says. “Extra protection is always a good thing,” he adds.

Applying facial sunscreen also increases the odds you’ll get your neck and ears, where people don’t usually apply makeup, Dr. Zeichner adds. (Same goes for your lips!)

Then, when you do touchups during the day, you’ll get a little added protection—and that’s important, too. “People think they’re good for the day because they apply sunscreen in the morning, but you need to reapply it throughout the day,” Dr. Day says.

She also recommends using powder sunscreens for this purpose. You can simply dust them over your makeup and go about your day. “They’re good to have when you’re out and about and need reapplication,” Dr. Day says. (Ideally, you should be reapplying every two hours.)

Bottom line: Makeup with SPF is great to use, but shouldn’t be your only form of sun protection. “For daily use, these products are fine. But for intense sun exposure, a regular sunscreen is best,” Dr. Goldenberg says.



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