

what to expect.

Homemade Sunscreen Is Becoming More Popular — but Is It Safe?



by Korin Miller – Updated: May 20, 2019



When it comes to SPF, you really don't want to go the DIY route, experts say.

When you want DIY inspiration, you head to Pinterest. But while the website is a great place to discover recipes and crafts, there are some DIY ideas that are definitely questionable.

Pinterest is packed with tutorials for “all-natural sunscreen,” “DIY sunscreen” and “herbal sunscreen,” and many claim that these homemade formulas are great for moms-to-be or even kids. Each DIY sunscreen recipe varies slightly, but they generally contain beeswax, zinc and shea or cocoa butter. Some varieties contain almond oil, and a few also have essential oils.

Many of these homemade sunscreen recipes suggest that the DIY formulas are better for you than the conventional sunscreens you see on store shelves. But is sunscreen really something you want to make yourself?

Is DIY sunscreen safe?

Not really. “Sunscreens are highly complex and regulated by the Food and Drug Administration,” says **Gary Goldenberg, M.D.**, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital. “There are many nuances and some formulations may not even work as well as advertised if not used correctly. So, I really worry about DIY formulations for sunscreen.”

Using your own sunscreen may even do “more harm than good,” says Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist in New York City. “If you have a false sense of protection, you may be outdoors more than you would be otherwise and not adequately unprotected,” he tells us. What’s more, some ingredients used in homemade sunscreens, such as essential oils, can actually cause a chemical burn when exposed to sunlight, he points out.

Even if you made your own sunscreen and had good results one time, there’s no guarantee it will work well the next, says Doris Day, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist in New York City and author of *Beyond Beautiful*. “It’s very hard to have quality control and consistency from one batch to the next,” she says. “This is not safe. It’s a little bit scary that people are doing this.”

In general, Dr. Goldenberg says you should be selective about the products you DIY. “If it’s a scrub or a mask for a cosmetic use, it’s one thing,” he says. “But when it comes to protecting your skin from the sun’s harmful rays, it’s really important to use the best and safest products regulated by the FDA.”

It’s crucial to use sunscreen all the time, but especially during pregnancy

Pregnancy increases your risk of developing a skin condition called melasma, discoloration that can appear on your skin, according to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). It mostly shows up on your face in sun-exposed areas like the cheeks, nose, upper lip and forehead. Wearing sunscreen can help prevent these dark spots from developing or getting worse, Dr. Goldenberg says.

Women may even be more susceptible to developing skin cancer during and right after pregnancy. “We see skin cancer, changing moles and melanomas in pregnancy all the time,” Dr. Day says. “Sun protection is your best defense against any of that.”

Most commercially-available sunscreens are considered safe to use during pregnancy, which is why ACOG recommends wearing sunscreen and using a wide-brimmed hat whenever you go outside.

There are also many safe sunscreens to choose from. “With so many well-formulated products commercially available, there is an option to suit every preference,” says Dr. Zeichner. In general, you’ll want to look for formulas with zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide as the active ingredients.

So, when it comes to sunscreen, skip the DIY ideas and go with store-bought products that have been tested. “Why take the chance?” Dr. Day says.