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- *Several social media influencers have made claims that sunscreen is bad for you.*
- *Research has proven that sunscreen can help lower the risk of developing skin cancer.*
- *Doctors recommend wearing sunscreen every time you step outside.*

Social media has a reputation for spreading misinformation, especially around health. But there is a growing wave of influencers who insist that sunscreen is bad for you, and it's getting plenty of attention.

One person talking about this is Riley Check, who wrote a message on X that went viral that said, "People who wear sunscreen are always getting skin cancer." Gubba Homestead, who is another influencer, shared a video on X of herself sitting in the sun. "There is no proof the sun causes cancer," she wrote over top. "I don't wear sunscreen, and I never will," she wrote in the caption. "We blame the sun for cancer when we should be blaming our diets. But if we cleaned up our diets, how would Big Food and Big Pharma make their money? Sunscreen and a poor diet will make you sick."

Kristin Cavallari also said in a January episode of her Let's Be Honest podcast that she doesn't wear sunscreen. Her guest, holistic doctor Ryan Monahan, responded by saying, "the sun is life-giving and nourishing" and claimed that following an anti-inflammatory diet can create an "antioxidant reservoir" in the body. That, along with developing a "base coat" of a tan through gradual sun exposure can help people be outside without getting burned, he claimed.

While Monahan said that having astaxanthin—a pigment that shows up in shrimp, trout, and yeast—in your diet can help lower your risk of burns, that is based on a very small study and animal studies. There are also potential dangers to implying people don't need sunscreen at all.

Meet the experts: Ife J. Rodney, M.D., founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics; Gary Goldenberg, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist practicing in New York City; Cindy Wassef, M.D., an assistant professor at the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School; Joshua Zeichner, M.D., director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital.

Years of research has found that unprotected sun exposure can lead to skin cancer, and that sunscreen can help. Here's what you need to know.

### **Does sunscreen cause cancer?**

More than 3 million people in the U.S. are diagnosed each year with skin cancer, making it the most common form of cancer diagnosed in this country, according to the American Cancer Society (ACS).

Skin cancer is an abnormal growth of skin cells, which is usually caused by the sun's harmful rays, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). Genes and environmental factors—including exposure to harmful UV rays from the sun—can play a role in a person's development of skin cancer, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says.

The AAD recommends using a broad-spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher to help prevent skin cancer and recommends using sunscreen whenever you'll be outside, even on cloudy days. Other steps, like seeking shade when you can—especially between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest—and avoiding tanning beds can also help lower your skin cancer risk, the AAD says.

Claims that sunscreen causes cancer are "absolutely not" true, says Gary Goldenberg, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist practicing in New York City. "These social media claims are completely false and aren't based on any scientific data," he says. "Data clearly show that UV [rays] cause skin cells to mutate and produce cancerous cells."

The data is "indisputable and multiple mutations have been identified," Dr. Goldenberg says. "It's also been shown that sun protection, including using sunscreen, can help decrease skin cancer cell formation," he adds.

It's not clear what kind of cancer influencers think sunscreen causes, but there is no evidence linking sunscreen use, including chemical sunscreen use, to any form of cancer, points out Ife J. Rodney, M.D., founding director of Eternal Dermatology + Aesthetics. "There are chemicals in a bunch of different substances that we put on our skin and in medications," she says. "You really have to take all information in context and make sure you're basing your actions on fact."

### **What chemicals should you avoid in sunscreen?**

All chemicals that are used in chemical sunscreens in the U.S. are approved by the FDA, Dr. Goldenberg points out. “Chemical sunscreens have been shown to be safe,” he says. “There’s no cause and effect evidence in humans that they cause cancer.”

However, some people are wary of polyfluoroalkyl phosphate esters (PAP) and polytetrafluoroethylene (PFTE). These are PFAS compounds, aka “forever chemicals,” although most sunscreens that contain them only have them at low levels, according to the University of Colorado. PFAS is also found in the water, air, and soil, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Oxybenzone is another ingredient that has been flagged over concerns that it’s a hormone disrupter. But there are no conclusive studies that oxybenzone is harmful to humans, and research that links oxybenzone to harm cite rat studies where the rodents were actually fed oxybenzone. It would take someone 277 years of sunscreen use to have the same dose that produced these effects, according to a study published in the Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology.

“At one point, there were reports of benzene being present in sunscreen,” says Cindy Wassef, M.D., an assistant professor at the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School. (Benzene is a cancer-causing substance that’s typically used as a solvent, per the National Cancer Institute.) “This is not a sunscreen ingredient, but represented a contaminant,” Dr. Wassef says.

### **Why people should use sunscreen**

A lot of the commentary around skipping sunscreen points out that our caveman ancestors didn’t wear sunscreen and didn’t get skin cancer (that we know of).

But it’s not that our ancestors figured out how to avoid skin cancer—they typically died before the cumulative effects of sun damage would show up as skin cancer, Dr. Rodney says. “Skin cancers usually arise from cumulative sun damage,” she explains. “As time goes on, your risk of skin cancer increases. By the 50s or 60s, a lot of people who should have gotten skin cancer would see it by that point.”

But sunscreen has been proven to lower your risk of developing skin cancer, points out Joshua Zeichner, M.D., director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital. “When it comes to sunscreen, the benefits in protecting the skin against the development of skin cancers, including life-threatening melanoma, outweigh any perceived risks that sunscreen is harmful to your health,” he says. “Be cautious in listening to unvetted information you may hear on social media. Anyone can say whatever they want on social media, whether it is factually correct or not.”

### **What’s the safest kind of sunscreen?**

All of the sunscreens sold in the U.S., whether they are mineral or chemical based, have been tested to be safe in humans, Dr. Rodney points out.

“Ultimately, the type of sunscreen you use is your personal preference,” Dr. Zeichner says. “Mineral sunscreens are a great option for kids and people who are sensitive, since they tend to be less potentially irritating. However, they can leave behind a white cast on the skin if not fully rubbed in.”

Dr. Rodney suggests including both mineral and chemical sunscreen in your routine, if you don’t have sensitive skin. “Chemical sunscreen usually goes on the skin easier and has a more elegant finish,” which makes it ideal for layering under makeup and using on the face, she says. “But mineral sunscreen blocks a larger spectrum,” she adds.

### **The bottom line**

There is a lot of research to support the use of sunscreen to lower your risk of developing skin cancer—and from getting burned when you’re out in the sun. If you have questions about sunscreen safety, consult a board-certified dermatologist for more information—not a social media influencer.

*Source:* <https://www.prevention.com/health/a60883689/is-sunscreen-bad-for-you/>