

This Easy Hack Can ‘Reverse’ Sun Damage, According to Dermatologists



- Regular sunscreen use may help reverse signs of sun damage, according to dermatologists.
- Sunscreen allows skin to focus on repairing itself, instead of fighting off additional injury from UV rays.
- Proper sunscreen use is crucial, though.

It's common knowledge that sunscreen can prevent premature signs of aging by protecting against the sun's harsh UV rays. But recently, a dermatologist surprised some when she suggested SPF could go further —potentially even turning back the clock on your skin.

“Consistent sunscreen use over time has actually been shown to reverse sun damage,” California dermatologist [Samantha Ellis, M.D.](#), said in a recent [TikTok](#). “Sunscreen makes you look younger over time” by improving skin texture and helping dark spots fade, she added.

Dr. Ellis' comments come months after a paper published in the [Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology](#) found that most experts agree that sunscreen is a powerful skincare product. For the paper, researchers asked 62 dermatologists at 43 academic centers across the country how effective they thought a wide range of products and skincare ingredients were in treating various skin health issues.

Meet the experts: [Joshua Zeichner, M.D.](#), director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital; [Ife J. Rodney, M.D.](#), double-board-certified dermatologist and founding director of Eternal Dermatology and Aesthetics; [Gary Goldenberg, M.D.](#), a board-certified dermatologist in New York City

The vast majority—96.8%—said mineral sunscreen was their top choice for preventing fine lines and wrinkles. In fact, the data suggested many believed mineral sunscreen was as important as retinoids, which are a mainstay of commercial anti-aging skincare products. (Chemical sunscreen was highly rated, too.)

While many people slather on sunscreen as a preventative measure, the idea that it can promote skin renewal isn't well-known. Below, dermatologists break down how this works.

Why might sunscreen help skin look younger?

There are a few reasons for this. “Sunscreen is perhaps the best anti-aging tool we have for our skin,” says [Joshua Zeichner, M.D.](#), director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Hospital. “UVA rays from the sun not only put you at risk for skin cancer, but also for premature aging.” UV light exposure has been linked to the development of fine lines and wrinkles, dark spots, and broken capillaries, all of which can age your skin, he explains.

Sunscreen can also protect against skin discoloration that can make you look older, says [Ife J. Rodney, M.D.](#), a double-board-certified dermatologist and founding director of Eternal Dermatology and Aesthetics. “The sun triggers more production of melanocytes—cells that produce the pigment melanin—which can lead to discoloration,” she explains. “Using sunscreen consistently blocks those triggers so you don't get as much discoloration.”

“UV is also responsible for destruction of adipose tissue in the skin, leading to even more skin sagging,” adds [Gary Goldenberg, M.D.](#), a board-certified dermatologist in New York City.

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On the other hand, when you wear (and regularly reapply) sunscreen, it blocks out those UV rays. Moreover, it can even promote younger-looking skin. “There is actually good scientific evidence that sunscreen use decreases signs of skin aging,” Dr. Goldberg says. He cites an older clinical trial published in [Annals of Internal Medicine](#) that divided 903 adults into

groups that used sunscreen daily and sporadically. Those who used sunscreen daily had “no detectable increase in skin aging after 4.5 years.”

Wearing sunscreen allows your skin to do its job more efficiently, Dr. Zeichner explains. He points out that the skin can heal itself more easily when it’s not constantly dealing with free radicals (or unstable atoms) from UV light. “This means healthy skin cell growth and repair with improvements in sun-related dark spots and even enhanced skin barrier function,” he says.

What are the limits of this?

Dermatologists agree that using sunscreen can help preserve youthful-looking skin, lower the risk of sun damage, and give your skin time to repair itself. But Dr. Rodney says it’s important to have perspective on how much sunscreen can do. “I would not say that using sunscreen will undo deep wrinkles and collagen breakdown,” she says. Instead, the effects may be more subtle.

Dr. Zeichner also stresses that sunscreen is only effective when it’s used properly. “It is important to protect yourself from the sun every day, not just when you are at the beach,” he says. “Incidental UV light exposure adds up over time.” That’s why he suggests wearing sunscreen in the car, when you’re eating lunch outside, or even when you plan to be indoors. “You are at risk for sun damage,” he says. “UVA rays penetrate through the clouds and through window glass, so you can expose yourself to sun damage, even if you are outside on a cloudy day or indoors or in the car next to a window.”

Regularly seeking shade also helps, Dr. Rodney adds.

How to maximize sunscreen use for younger-looking skin

Applying sunscreen in the morning and reapplying throughout the day is one of the best ways to maximize the perks, according to Dr. Rodney.

“This is one of the main and most important things you can do for your skin,” she says.

Dr. Goldenberg points out that you can use sunscreen along with other beneficial ingredients, which will maximize results. “It can be used together with other anti-aging skincare products, such as retinol and vitamin C,” he says.

Overall, dermatologists agree that daily sunscreen use is the way to go for younger-looking skin. “If you want healthy, clear, and wrinkle-free skin, wear sunscreen daily,” Dr. Zeichner says.
