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ISSUE: JULY 2011

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CHOOSING A SUNSCREEN



hour in the garden dodging clouds, so confess to not using sunscreen, apart from on holiday when I have the time and, hopefully, the weather to be outdoors all day. Remember the Vitamin D conference that John attended? The expert advice from there was to get half an hour of sun, then apply sunscreen. Other alternatives are to apply sunscreen or to get out of the sun when you start to get a wee bit pink. Common sense will have to kick in as we judge each day as it comes.

Ingredients To Avoid Did you know that you absorb up to 60% of any substance applied to your skin? The two main causes of allergy and irritation in body care products are fragrances and preservatives. Some of the worst offenders from preservatives release small amounts of formaldehyde, which is an irritant as well as a carcinogen and neurotoxin. Diazolidinyl urea, DMDM hydantoin, Imidazolidinyl urea and Quaternium 15 are examples.

Last summer I forgot to take my natural sunscreen on a sailing holiday in the English Channel and rather than burn I picked up a sunscreen spray in the marina supermarket. Googling some of the ingredients has been an education as many are associated with allergies and contact dermatitis. Some have strong evidence of being respiratory toxicants, asthmatics beware. Butylphenyl methylpropional is a synthetic scent associated with allergies and contact dermatitis. Benzyl salicylate can disrupt hormones and is a suspected environmental toxin. If you swim it ends up in the sea, if you shower it could still end up in the sea... and we wonder how icebergs and arctic animals contain pollutants. But will choosing a natural product be any better for the environment? Zinc oxide may be very effective as a UV filter but there are concerns over its environmental impact because it is strongly toxic to aquatic
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Everyone knows we need to use sunscreen, right? UVB-radiation can result in burning, which may result in skin cancer. UVA-radiation goes deeper into the skin, accelerating the skin ageing process by breaking down collagen and elastin tissues. Skin cancer is now the most common form of malignant disease, and it is recognised that UV exposure is the major cause of skin cancer, including both melanoma and non-melanoma.

Unfortunately, it has been found that the use of sunscreens can actually increase a person's risk of developing malignant melanoma. There is a mistaken belief out there that sun block protects against skin cancer as well as sunburn. An SPF100 sun lotion only offers 3% more UVB protection than an SPF25. The key is to apply adequate sunscreen to exposed skin and reapply every two hours. For more guidance see www.greenpeople.co.uk/apply_sunlotion

What about Vitamin D? Guidance recommends applying sunscreen half an hour before going out in the sun and avoiding the sun from 11am till 3pm. Trouble is for us in Scotland, we are fighting a Vitamin D deficiency. UVB (b for burning), rays make Vitamin D. I myself don't have time to be out in the sun all day and am lucky to catch half an

DEFINING: Neem

Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) is a tree which grows extensively in India and East Africa. It's used traditionally for a variety of different problems, from repelling insects to cleaning teeth. In India it is known variously as the Holy Tree and the Tree of Forty Cures.

We first heard of Neem in 1998 when Bioforce set up a company to get some research going on the benefits of Neem and also to bring Neem products to a wider public. We still stock some of their products which were based on research done at Glasgow University and the Scottish Agricultural College in Edinburgh.

Although all parts of the Neem tree are used traditionally, in this country it tends just to be the seed and the leaf. The seed yields an oil which has extremely strong antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral properties. It is also a very good insect repellent. A compound called azadirachtin stops insects from feeding and prevents them from growing properly and laying eggs. In India a Neem plant might be given to newly-weds to plant by their new house. The leaves provide shade and the phytochemicals within the tree keep insect infestation down.

The Neem oil that we sell in the shop is diluted as the natural smell of Neem is quite garlicky. It could be used on almost any skin ailment to keep bugs out and to moisturise the skin. The pure oil can be used to deal effectively with fungal conditions such as nail infections. Karyn MacKay, a Medical Herbalist working for Ayurvedic specialist Pukka Herbs, recommends soaking a cottonwool ball in Neem oil and binding it to the nail with a plaster. Taking Neem capsules internally at the same time will help to keep the fungus on the run that way too.

Neem leaf extract has most of the properties of the oil but is



also anti-inflammatory. As a runner I have lost count of the number of times I have been saved from sweat rashes by use of the Neem Cream made from the leaves. I also remember using it for my son when he had cradle cap as a baby. The Neem Cream went on one day, the next day the cradle cap was gone, never to return. This would make some kind of sense as it is generally thought to be a fungal condition. The Neem Leaf Shampoo is increasingly popular for general scalp issues and dandruff.

Karyn MacKay describes Neem as the perfect travelers' herb, probably due the variety of actions that it can effectively perform. The Neem Insect Repellent (developed in Edinburgh!) was tested to be 100% effective at repelling midges and mosquitoes on the treated areas of skin. The cream could help to soothe inflammation, rashes, and sunburn. The capsules could also be used to keep dodgy stuff away from your delicate digestive system. In India kids collect the twigs to sell as natural toothbrushes.

I think the general message is – if you can't get a Neem tree, get yourself into the shop and find how good Neem products are for yourself!

John, Diploma in Health Food Retailing

SUNSCREENS



Good Websites

To check out the ingredients in your skin care products try www.ewg.org/skindeep and there's more info at www.wen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/cosmetics_norefs1.pdf

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life, even at very low levels. Green People, a UK manufacturer of alternative sunscreens, choose not to use it.

Alternative Sunscreens The UVA mineral filters are good because they bounce off light, but will they make us look white and pasty? Zinc oxide and larger particles of titanium dioxide can, so size does matter here. Large particles of titanium dioxide (over 200nm or nanometres) reflect light in the visible spectrum which is why they look white. Smaller particles in the size range 20-60nm are too small to reflect visible light, but instead they reflect light in the UV range which is what makes them very effective as sun filters. Green People use small particles of titanium dioxide and a UVB filter, Isoamyl p-Methoxycinnamate (IMC) which does not produce a white effect. So far it looks as if, unlike some other chemical UV filters (for example, Homosalate, Oxybenzone, and Octinoxate) IMC does not have any oestrogenic activity and is on the whole non-irritating to the skin. It is manufactured from Cinnamic acid made from cinnamon leaves.

Before you get concerned about how much titanium dioxide you'll absorb I have some good news. In a cream or lotion, the tiny particles clump together; still able to do their job but too big to get past the outer layer of skin.

Prickly Heat, also known as miliaria, causes bumps or blisters to appear in a skin rash produced in hot weather. Irritatingly the problem can recur year on year but switching to a non-waterproof, synthetic chemical-free sunscreen may help to reduce symptoms. Green People sun lotions are water-resistant, meaning they don't totally repel water but they do allow the skin to breathe.

Candy, Diploma in Nutritional Healing