Understanding SPF (Sun Protection Factor)

time well spent

To understand SPF, you first should know about the sun's different ultraviolet rays: UVA and UVB.

- **UVA** rays pass easily through the ozone layer and are responsible for most of our sun exposure. These rays can cause skin aging and wrinkling and contribute to skin cancer, including melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer.
- **UVB** rays are also dangerous and can cause sunburns and cataracts. They also contribute to skin cancer. Melanoma is considered to be associated with severe UVB sunburns that occur before the age of 20. The earth's ozone layer absorbs most UVB rays, but enough of them aren't completely filtered and can cause serious damage.

It's important to protect yourself and your family from exposure to UVA and UVB rays. One way to do that is to consistently use a sunscreen with a high enough SPF.

SPF is available in sunscreen lotions, sprays and gels in factors of 4 to even 80. An SPF offers a level of protection against UVB rays several times higher than what your skin could normally handle without it. For example: If you have fair skin and tend to burn within 10 minutes of sun exposure, an SPF of 4 will allow you to remain in the sun four times longer than you normally could before burning. Essentially, you'd be okay for 40 minutes in the sun.

For more information on sun-safe skin or skin cancer, visit MyHealth@Anthem at anthem.com. Also visit the following sites:

National Cancer Institute - www.cancer.gov
American Cancer Society – www.cancer.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – www.cdc.gov
National Institutes of Health – www.nih.gov

Sources: National Cancer Institute, American Academy of Dermatology, American Cancer Society

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