



Get sun-smart

With Dr Catherine Stone, as seen on TV One's *10 Years Younger*

What you really need to know about sunscreens

Q A recent article suggested titanium and zinc-based sunblocks might not be as good as initially thought. Should I keep using them?

A You absolutely should! The article you refer to has been labelled as “highly inaccurate and misleading to consumers about the safety of sunscreens in NZ” by the CTFA (Cosmetic Toiletries and Fragrance Association of NZ), and other NZ authorities. The Australian regulator, the TGA, also pointed out the sunscreens with “nanotechnology” had been used safely in Australia since 1990, with no reports or research suggesting any problems or adverse effects.

Zinc oxide and titanium dioxide provide the best broad spectrum sun protection, as they sit on top of the skin and

reflect the sun's rays, rather than chemical sunscreens which each absorb a certain amount of UV. Zinc is also helpful in improving healing.

The article you read was questioning the use of “nanotechnology”, or the science of reducing the size of molecules while still retaining many of their properties, to create some of the “invisible” sunscreens.

While the article suggested nanoparticles of titanium and zinc may be small enough to pass through the skin, there is no conclusive evidence to support this. Also, keep in mind that titanium is considered to be safe in the body, which is why it is the major metal used for hip and knee replacements.

All sunscreen products sold in NZ must be safe as required under the Cosmetic Group Standard Regulations 2008 under the Hazardous

Substances and New Organisms Act 1996, and the fact that both the Cosmetic Group Standard and the Consumer Guarantees Act require that cosmetic products be safe provides a robust legal mechanism to ensure the safety of sunscreens.

Many people die from (largely preventable) skin cancer every year. Apply a broad spectrum sunscreen every day, and reapply every two hours if you are in the sun. Wear a hat and cover up in the midday heat, replace vitamins and antioxidants in the skin if you have been sun exposed, and don't get lulled into a sense of false security by a high-SPF sunscreen.

I believe good sun protection habits and use of a high quality, broad spectrum sunscreen containing zinc oxide or titanium oxide are the best ways to protect your skin from the harsh NZ sun.



PICTURES: GETTY IMAGES.

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