

# Sunscreen Product Review

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*Disclosure: Recommended products link to the EWG website. If you use the Amazon link on their page, EWG may receive a commission on purchases made through the link. I do not receive a commission.*

Choosing a sunscreen is particularly challenging because it is not enough to look at the safety of the ingredients. Sunscreens can help prevent skin cancer by protecting you from the sun's harmful radiation. Products need to be not only safe but also effective.

Even when you find a sunscreen that is both safe and effective it should be used as a last resort to avoiding damaging effects of the sun. Avoiding the sun and wearing protective clothing including hats and sunglasses should be the first line of defense. When you do use sunscreen, make sure to follow the directions. Sunscreens with safer ingredients often require more frequent application and some are not waterproof.

This guide is designed to help you find one that is safe, effective and right for you and your family. I've personally tested each of the recommended products and comment on the experience. I always find it frustrating when I buy expensive, nontoxic products only to find they don't work for me. Please know though, that because everyone is different, I cannot predict whether any individual may have an adverse reaction to any product.

## **SPF is Not the Only Important Measure of Protection**

There are two types of UV rays that can cause skin cancer: UVA and UVB. UVB rays can burn the skin and most sunscreens are formulated to protect against these rays. SPF is a measure of UVB protection. There is increasing evidence that UVA rays, which do not blister the skin, can be equally damaging. Many American sunscreens don't adequately protect against UVA rays. The FDA has proposed changes to require greater UVA protection but that has not yet happened.

When choosing a sunscreen, it's important to look for good UVA protection as well as a good balance of UVA protection and UVB protection. SPF, which represents UVB protection, can also be misleading. SPF numbers above 15 provide only slightly more protection. SPF 15 blocks about 93% of UVB radiation, SPF 30 blocks about 97%, and SPF 50 blocks about 98%. Don't assume that a higher SPF will allow you to remain in the sun longer. Additionally, products with higher SPF products often have less UVA protection.

## **Chose Mineral Sunscreens Over Chemical Sunscreens**

The FDA has only recognized 2 active ingredients in sunscreens that have been adequately tested to be considered safe. Those are zinc oxide and titanium dioxide. Mineral sunscreens use one or a combination of these ingredients. Mineral sunscreens sit on top of the skin and

reflect the sun. Research has generally concluded that these ingredients do not cross the skin and enter the bloodstream.

All non-mineral, chemical sunscreens ingredients are absorbed into the skin. They can be measured in the blood even weeks after application. There is not adequate data on the active ingredients in chemical sunscreens to determine their safety. The most concerning ingredient is *oxybenzone*. Oxybenzone is a common sunscreen ingredient and studies indicate it is a hormone and endocrine disrupter, an allergen, and associated with lower birth weight. It is also known to cause coral reef bleaching.

Other active ingredients with insufficient data to prove their safety are *avobenzene*, *homosalate*, *octinoxate*, *octisalate*, *octocrylene*, *cinoxate*, *dioxybenzone*, *ensulizole*, *meradimate*, *padimate o*, and *sulisobenzene*. Of these, avobenzene is considered to have a relatively low risk of toxicity.

There are two ingredients, PABA and trolamine salicylate that have adequate data that they are unsafe. They have been phased out of most sunscreens.

### **Nanoparticles in Sunscreen**

Nanoparticles in cosmetic products are not well regulated and need further research. Their use in mineral sunscreen lotion, however, is generally considered safe because they remain on the surface and outer layers of the skin. Several mineral sunscreens claim to have *non-nano* ingredients. These claims can be misleading because the definition of the term is broad and the properties of the particles vary by manufacturer. Larger particles tend to be more protective against UVA rays so it's likely that a product with good UVA protection has larger particles. It's better to look for a product that has adequate UVA coverage than worry about a non-nano claim.

In general, smaller particles are more transparent and have better SPF protection but are less protective against UVA rays. If you are using a clear mineral sunscreen make sure it has adequate UVA protection.

All of the reviewed products with a grade of "A" have both non-nano mineral ingredients and at least good UVA protection.

### **Avoid All Sprays and Powders**

Inhaling nanoparticles is dangerous regardless of the particle size so it is best to avoid all spray and powder sunscreens. In 2019 the FDA proposed more testing to make sure that spray and powder sunscreens don't release nanoparticles or small particle that could damage the lungs but that has not yet happened.

Grade: A

### Kabana Organic Skincare Green Screen Sunscreen Lotion, Neutral Tint, SPF 31

**EWG Rating:** 1, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Excellent UVA protection and good UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$16.49 (\$4.12/oz.). Kabanaskincare.com has the cheapest price.

**Comments:**

This is the only product I tested with excellent UVA protection. The company is very transparent and publishes their SPF test results. Baby and pregnancy safe. Ingredients are mostly organic. The tinted versions contain polysorbate-60 which is an emulsifier. It is considered safe and is approved as a food additive. There is a risk of it being contaminated with harmful byproducts from its manufacture, but contamination can be controlled. The Original formula does not contain this ingredient. The product is not waterproof.

**Product Performance:**

My teenage daughter and I like this the best! This is a light, not-too-greasy formula that rubs in well. There are 3 tinted colors available. We used the neutral tint which worked well on both our fair and olive skin tones. The product is unscented but it has a faint pasty smell, typical of mineral sunscreens.

### Butterbean Organics Simple Healthy Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 30

**EWG Rating:** 1, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and good UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$16.00 (\$4.00/oz.). If you purchase a 12 Oz. refill pack, it is \$3.44/oz.

**Comments:**

Mostly organic, very safe ingredients. I love that the bottle is metal with a pump top and is refillable. They sell 12 oz. refill pouches.

**Product Performance:**

This is a nice lotion-like consistency that is not too thick. It is white but rubs in fairly well. It is unscented but has a pasty smell typical of mineral sunscreens.

### Raw Elements Face + Body Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 30

**EWG Rating:** 1, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and good UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$17.49 (\$5.83/oz.)

**Comments:**

Very safe, mostly organic ingredients. It is water resistant and reef safe.

**Product Performance:**

This is slightly greasy and white but it rubs in well. It is unscented but has a slight smell, possibly from rosemary oil.

### Beautycounter Countersun Mineral Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 30

**EWG Rating:** 2, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and good UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$39 (\$5.82)

**Comments:**

This has a longer list of ingredients than most but they are relatively safe. Ingredients include citrus oils, including Citrus Limon Peel Oil and Citrus Aurantium Dilluc Peel oil, which are potential skin irritants.

**Product Performance:**

Natural oils and extracts give this lotion a subtle citrus scent. It is a very light and non-greasy lotion. It goes on white but very quickly vanishes into the skin. If you don't like the thicker, whiter mineral sunscreens this might be a good choice.

### \*Badger Sunscreen Cream Unscented, SPF 30

**EWG Rating:** 1, low hazard

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and good UVA/SPF balance.

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$14 (\$4.83/oz.)

**Comments:**

Just five very safe ingredients. All badger sunscreen body lotions have similar ingredient safety ratings and UVA/SPF protection with the exception of Badger Clear Sport Kids Sunscreen Cream, Tangerine and Vanilla SPF 40 which has only moderate UVA/SPF balance and a safety rating of 2.

**Product Performance:**

Thick white formula that is fairly easy to rub in. It is unscented but has a faint pasty smell typical of mineral sunscreens.

### Two Peas Organics Mineral Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 30

**EWG Rating:** 1, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and good UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$14.95 (\$4.98/oz.)

**Comments:**

Very safe, mostly organic ingredients.

**Product Performance:**

Thick, white formula that rubs in fairly well. It is unscented and has the least odor of any tested products.

### Juice Beauty Sport Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 30

**EWG Rating:** 2, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and good UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$12.80 (\$4.27)

**Comments:**

Includes citrus oils, including Citrus Limon Peel Oil and Citrus Aurantium Dilcus Peel oil, which are potential skin irritants. It has some organic ingredients.

**Product Performance:**

Natural oils give this lotion a subtle citrus scent. The lotion is light and non-greasy and rubs in well.

**Grade: B**

**\*California Kids Supersensitive Tinted Sunscreen Lotion, 30+**

**EWG Rating:** 2, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Moderate UVA protection and moderate UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano titanium dioxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$19.99 (\$6.89/oz.)

**Comments:**

This has a few organic ingredients. This receives a grade of B because of the moderate UVA protection and UVA/UVB balance.

**Product Performance:**

I tested the tinted version. It is very slightly tinted and still rubs on fairly white. It rubs in well. Though unscented, it has a light, pleasantly fruity smell.

**\*Thinkbaby Lotion, SPF 50+**

**EWG Rating:** 2, low hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and moderate UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Non-nano zinc oxide

**Price (Price per ounce):** \$9.89 (\$3.30)

**Comments:** I did not test this product. This receives a grade of B because of the moderate balance of UVA/UVB.

**Grade: C**

**\*Alba Botanica Sport Mineral Sunscreen Lotion, SPF 45**

**EWG Rating:** 3, moderate hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and moderate UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Titanium Dioxide and zinc oxide.

*Note: There is also an Alba Botanical Sport Sunscreen that looks similar but is not Mineral and uses chemical ingredients such as avobenzone and homosalate.*

**\*Solimo General Protection Lotion, SPF 50**

**EWG Rating:** 4, moderate hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and moderate UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Avobenzone, homosalate, octisalate, octocrylene, oxybenzone

**\*Trader Joe's Face & Body Lotion, SPF 30**

**EWG Rating:** 4, moderate hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Moderate UVA protection and moderate UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Avobenzone, homosalate, octisalate, octocrylene, oxybenzone

**Grade: F**

**\*Coppertone Ultra Guard Lotion, SPF 70**

**EWG Rating:** 7, high hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and moderate UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Avobenzone, homosalate, octisalate, octocrylene, oxybenzone

**\*CVS Health Ultra Protection Sun Lotion, SPF 70**

**EWG Rating:** 7, high hazard

**UVA/UVB Protection:** Good UVA protection and moderate UVA/SPF balance.

**Active Ingredient:** Avobenzone, homosalate, octisalate, octocrylene, oxybenzone

#### Sources

This guide is based on the [Environmental Working Group \(EWG\) 2020 Guide to Sunscreens](#). EWG's annual guide is written by a team of scientists and includes analysis of hundreds of technical studies. It goes beyond assessing the toxicity of ingredients and evaluates the effectiveness at blocking harmful UV rays. I believe it is the gold standard. EWG is an outstanding source. Some categories they evaluate can have out-of-date or incomplete information. Their sunscreen analysis, however, is updated annually and incorporates the latest scientific information available.

If you purchase any of these products please use the links to go to the EWG site. Once on the product page, use their Amazon link to purchase so that EWG may receive a commission to support their work.

My Product Reviews for personal care products use EWG as one of several sources including my own research. The sunscreen review, however, is based on the EWG guide because it is the most current and comprehensive available. I also use and evaluate each of the recommended products and tell you about the experience. It can be frustrating and expensive to buy nontoxic products only to find that they don't work.

\* [Consumer Reports](#) top-rated sunscreens.