

Sun-protective clothing: Worth the expense?

I've seen ads for sun-protective clothing. Is it worth the expense?

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Answer

Wearing sun-protective clothing is one of the most effective ways to guard your skin from the sun's harmful rays. When deciding whether to buy sun-protective clothing, consider personal factors — such as the amount of time you're planning to spend in the sun and the cost of the clothing.

Unlike typical summer fabrics, sun-protective clothing is tightly woven. Manufacturers also may add chemicals that absorb ultraviolet (UV) radiation to the fabric. When buying sun-protective clothing, look on product labels for a high UV protection factor (UPF). Levels range from UPF 15 to 50+. A shirt labeled UPF 30 will allow only 1/30th of the sun's ultraviolet rays to reach your skin. Be aware, however, that a garment labeled UPF 50+ may not offer much more protection than does a UPF 50 garment. Sun-protective clothing also may lose its effectiveness to a varying degree if it's stretched, gets wet or is washed repeatedly. Buying clothing with a UPF of 40 or more may help guard against the effects of such natural wear and tear.

If you don't want to invest in sun-protective clothing, take other steps to protect your skin from the sun:

- Avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when the sun's rays are strongest.
- Use generous amounts of sunscreen when you're in the sun.
- Wear tightly woven, loose fitting clothing that covers as much of your skin as possible. Opt for bright or dark colors, which reflect more ultraviolet radiation than pastels or bleached cotton. Repeatedly washing your clothing also may tighten the weave, providing better protection.

You might also use laundry additives, such as Sun Guard, which contain UV-absorbing chemicals that boost a regular fabric's UPF.