

Does sunscreen expire?

Is sunscreen from last year still good? When does sunscreen expire?

With Mayo Clinic dermatologist Lawrence E. Gibson, M.D.

Answer

Sunscreens are designed to remain stable and at original strength for up to three years. This means that you can use leftover sunscreen from one year to the next.

Some sunscreens include an expiration date, or an indication of when the sunscreen is no longer effective. Discard sunscreen that's past the expiration date, is more than three years old or has been exposed to high temperatures.

Keep in mind, however, that if you use sunscreen generously and frequently, a bottle of sunscreen shouldn't last from one year to the next. Generally, a liberal application is 1 ounce (30 milliliters) — the amount in a shot glass — to cover all exposed parts of the body. If you have a 4-ounce (118-milliliter) bottle, you'll use about one-fourth of it during one application.

To maximize protection, use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends using a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or more. Apply sunscreen generously 20 to 30 minutes before going outdoors and reapply about every two hours — or more often if you're swimming or sweating. Be sure to rub the sunscreen in well.