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## Should You Consider Flying to Europe for Better Sunscreens?



There are many reasons to book a trip to Europe: the art, the history and the food, to name a few. And for some travelers, it's the shopping. But there's one item — whether you're a fashion lover or not — you might want to consider stocking up on during your next overseas getaway. And that's [sunscreens](#).

A just-released report by the Environmental Working Group revealed that nearly two-thirds of all sunscreens assessed would likely not be considered either effective or safe by US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) standards. Basically, most sunscreens don't provide ample sun protection and many contain harmful chemicals.

The group [reported similar findings in the past](#), but this marks the first year products were judged using [FDA safety guidelines](#) proposed in February. On top of that, it was reported that sunscreens in Europe are way better than those in the US, as they have better UVA protection standards.

So, with all this news around sunscreen — and summer vacations just around the corner — we decided to talk to some experts to find out what makes a good sunscreen, what to look for when buying one and whether or not it's worth flying to Europe to stock up on better sunscreens.

### **What Makes a Good Sunscreen**

When discussing sunscreens, there are two categories: chemical and physical. The means you either have one made of ingredients that are treated in chemical processes to absorb UV light so it can't penetrate your skin. Or, you have one made from titanium dioxide and zinc oxide, which acts as a barrier reflecting sunlight away. Both are effective, but some people are worried about the absorption of chemicals.

"Physical blockers like zinc and titanium do not get absorbed," board-certified dermatologist [Dr. Shari Sperling](#) told *The Points Guy*. "So, if concerned about the chemical ones, use the physical ones. But there is only mild absorption with chemical sunscreens."

And, since neither are technically considered "natural" (so don't be fooled if a brand markets a sunscreen as such), experts instead recommend you focus on the type of protection you're getting from a product. "Having both UVA and UVB protection is necessary," said [Dr. Michael Fiorillo](#), a double board-certified cosmetic surgeon and skin expert. "That's what ultimately makes a good sunscreen."

### **What to Look for in a Sunscreen**

OK, so you're at the store staring at a shelf of sunscreens. Which one should you choose? Well, sunscreens that offer above SPF 30 protection are a good baseline to start.

"If you want to get higher SPF, that is OK as well, but don't rely just on the SPF number," said [Dr. Sheel Solomon](#), a board-certified dermatologist in Raleigh, North Carolina. "SPF 60 offers a stronger amount of protection, but it all depends on the amount you are applying to your skin; whether or not you are reapplying after a certain amount of time or activity; and what other ingredients come in the product mixture."



A higher SPF doesn't always mean better sun protection. It also depends on how frequent you are applying the sunscreen.

Plus, you want to make sure you're getting efficient UVA and UVB protection.

"Often, products will display the term broad-spectrum protection, but it is important that you read about the product to figure out if they offer protection against both of these," said Solomon. "If you will be in the water or you tend to sweat a lot, look for a water-resistant formula."

### **Comparing European and American Sunscreens**

The Environmental Working Group's analysis, though shocking, is just a useful tool for determining what you need to look for in a sunscreen — and why. Though reports have come out saying Europe's sunscreen products are stronger, you are not necessarily relegated to traveling to Europe to stock up on these items. "People in the United States can also have access to adequate skin protecting products, but we have to learn to sift through the clutter," Solomon said. "Finding the right product for your skin with the right level of protection is a lot like finding the right foods to eat at the grocery store."

Just because you're bombarded with unhealthy processed foods, doesn't mean that you eat them. You've learned to care about your health by becoming educated on ingredients, nutritional values, and production processes. This is what we must do with sunscreen.

So, instead of jetting off to Europe, spend the time learning how much protection you need; and what products fulfill those needs without harming your skin with other chemicals.



Be careful when selecting your sunscreen so you can avoid harmful chemicals for your skin.

Plus, just because there might be ingredients not used in other countries, doesn't mean you should forgo American products. "There are some ingredients in Europe that are not used in the US because of FDA," said Sperling. "But US [products] are still good and should be used."

### **Getting Better Sunscreen**

Though Europe seems to be dominating the sunscreen game, more changes are on the way in the United States. "The FDA is revamping their oversight of sunscreen products, and that is a good thing for everyone," said Solomon. "For the sunscreen companies, this will provide higher benchmarks to offer better products to their consumers, and for the consumer, it means more data and more protection."

The FDA will be looking into more ingredients to determine if they are safe or if they need to be removed and replaced. The science behind further testing and the subsequent consensus of the FDA will help further improve the sunscreen products available to American consumers.

"Until then," said Solomon, "educate yourself about the ingredients in sunscreen, consult with your doctor if you have a specific condition such as extremely oily skin, or dehydrated skin. Once you can determine what product is best for you, pay attention to how you are supposed to apply and reapply for thorough protection."

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