



Some Dermatologists See a Sunscreen Revolution

A New Product Offers Better and Longer Protection, but Doctors Skeptical About Pill

By **JEFFREY KOFMAN**

May 19, 2006 — - Three girls lying in the harsh midday sun on Miami Beach giggled nervously when asked why they were exposing their skin to the sun's harmful rays.

"We need a good tan," said Cristina Bengochea.

"For graduation tomorrow," added Nataly Diaz.

This weekend they will graduate from high school and they are determined to look glamorous.

"It's in style to have a tan nowadays," said Cristina. "Because all the celebrities have it."

And that's the problem. People know that the sun's rays are harmful, but they can't resist. They also know that sunscreen helps.

Tamara Vanhell, who was soaking up the scene with her friend Brian Mascia, said that although she didn't mind sunscreen, "it's kind of a hassle."

As the summer suntan season begins, there is new hope -- sort of. A number of new products promise a revolution in a bottle, and dermatologists are enthusiastic about some of them.

"The big news is that there are products now that both stay on the skin longer and more importantly continue to work longer," said Dr. Allan Oseroff, a dermatologist and chair of the Roswell Park Cancer Institute at the University of Buffalo.

The most promising new products are sunscreen lotions containing an ingredient called Helioplex. It is being called the most important advance in sunscreen in 20 years.

Existing sunscreens effectively block UVB rays, but their UVA protection breaks down in less than two hours. Helioplex blocks those UVA rays for twice as long as anything that has come before. Neutrogena is one of the first manufacturers to put Helioplex products on the market in the United States.

"Helioplex is a great product," says Dr. Rachel Herschenfeld, a dermatologist in Massachusetts. "Most of the ingredients that protect us from UVA break down really soon after you go out in the sun. Helioplex prevents that from happening."

Dermatologists are less enthusiastic about new sun protection pills meant to be taken daily along with sunscreen lotions. Makers of a supplement tablet called the SunPill say it helps protect your skin against sun damage. But ABC News found that the medical community isn't buying that claim.

"My sense is the product is about hype," said Oseroff.

Until this week SunPill's website showed an endorsement from the former president of the Skin Cancer Foundation. But all references to the foundation have now been removed.

Dr. William Morison, chairman of the Skin Cancer Foundation's Photobiology Committee sent ABC News this statement: "Unsolicited information on the SunPill was sent to me for review. After the Skin Cancer Foundation's Photobiology Committee reviewed it, we concluded that there wasn't any science behind the sun protection claims. We would not advise people to take it as an effective sun protection product."

Another pill, Heliocare, gets a better review from dermatologists.

"Unlike the SunPill, Heliocare has been tested and really shown to provide a measure of protection against sunburn," said Herschenfeld.

But Herschenfeld and others say no pill can be used in place of sunscreen lotion. Doctors worry that people will just take the pill.

"Sun pills do sound like a great idea," said Herschenfeld. "It would be great if we could get up in the morning, take a pill and be protected from the damaging effects of UV rays on our skin all day long. Reality? We're not there yet."

Doctors say you have to use a lotion with SPF 30 or more to get any real protection. And you have to reapply it frequently, although less often if you use a product with Helioplex in it.

Back on Miami Beach, the three girls getting a tan in for high school graduation sheepishly showed off their sunscreen bottles. One had a bottle with SPF 4, another with SPF 6, and the third SPF 30.

"Who is the smart one?" we asked.

"I guess me," Cristina said with a giggle as she held up her bottle of SPF 30.

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