

A Towel Is NOT Enough!

Millions of tanners are using hand towels meant to wipe sweat off their body to “protect” their faces during their sunbed session. Those using the towels think they’re protected from UV rays and preventing dreaded wrinkles.

WRONG!

A towel provides an SPF (sun protection factor) of 5 – it’s not protecting your skin and it certainly isn’t protecting your eyes! The FDA has approved only UV-block goggles or disposable eye protection for use in a tanning unit. But let’s talk a bit about that towel not protecting your skin ...

Did you know that many garment makers now offer UV-block clothing? Why would they do that? Simply because the clothes we wear outside in the summer are NOT protecting your skin from UV. Yes, the tanning rays are sufficiently blocked so you aren’t tanning – but all the invisible rays are going through the fabric, and could be damaging your skin! “Weave is more important than fabric type,” reports the Skin Cancer Foundation newsletter. “The tighter the weave, the higher the SPF and darker clothes tend to be a higher SPF,” the report asserts.

Research from the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, GA suggests that the most popular summer garb of T-shirts and polo shirts are not adequate protection, as their SPF rank is 6.5. This has led to the creation of new, high-tech clothing that will block the rays when worn outside. The new clothes are coated with colorless compounds that absorb UV and offer an SPF of 30 or more.

Some outdoor clothing now carries a UPF (Ultraviolet Protection Factor) rating. REI, the outdoor giant, offers hundreds of garments for men, women and kids with their “Sahara Tech” protection of SPF 40+. Their long-sleeved men’s shirt with air vents, roll-up sleeves and big pockets ranges between \$35-\$50, so the UPF does not add substantially to the cost and allows the wearer to decrease UV skin damage to 1/40 of that which occurs without the shirt.

Land’s End, another large catalog company with sportswear, offers shorts and tops with nylon UPF fabric (nylon is a tight weave) and lots of clothes for kids with UV protection (a great idea).

I offer you the above as information only – personally, I tan my face and of course, I never enjoy a tanning session without eye protection! I tan very moderately, go to great lengths to not burn, and use quality tanning and facial care products to ensure my skin is moisturized. But if you have different feelings about exposing your face to UV, then don’t waste your time with a towel. Use a lotion with SPF of 15 or higher, preferably one made for the face that won’t clog your pores. Or, buy a shirt with UPF and cover your face with it (eye protection on, of course.) Remember to protect your eyes, as eyelids are only a 25% UV-block.

Your favorite salon carries a number of eye protection types; take the time to find the one that fits and works best for you, and keep them in a clean, safe place so that you’ll have your precious vision for a long time to come. ■

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Tanning industry veteran Brenda Fishbaugh is president of Eye Pro, Inc., makers of disposable eyewear. She travels extensively training salons on the effects of UV light on vision.

