

CHASING OLYMPIC GOLD: AMANDA BEARD & DEENA KASTOR

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SUN SMARTS

Protect yourself from the sun—and skin cancer—and enjoy a healthy, youthful glow for years to come.

By Marisa Walker



TY MILSFORD

According to the American Cancer Society, one in five Americans will be diagnosed with skin cancer in his or her lifetime. Melanoma is the most common and dangerous form of skin cancer in young women ages 25 to 29, and is second only to breast cancer in women ages 30 to 34.

Even the fittest of us are not exempt. In 2003 U.S. Olympic marathon runner Deena Kastor was diagnosed with skin cancer. "As athletes, we consider ourselves healthy," Kastor says. "We have a strong heart, lungs and muscles. Our skin, however, is our largest organ, so we better take care of it."

The good news: This is one cancer you can actively prevent. "Skin cancer is completely curable when detected early," says Dr. Elizabeth K. Hale, clinical assistant professor of dermatology at the New York University School of Medicine.

Even if you're not in the blazing sun for months at a time, you still need daily protection from the sun's intense rays. We've sorted through all the complicated label claims and confusing acronyms (SPF, UPF, UVB) found on sunscreen these days to help you choose and apply the right sun protection. Use it every day—your skin will thank you.

Bonus Block

Sun defense doesn't just come in a bottle or a tube. "Remember to protect your eyes with UV-blocking sunglasses and wear sun-protective clothing when possible," Dr. Elizabeth Martin says. Asics' Hydrology performance wear provides ultraviolet protection (asics.com), and the Cocona line from New Balance offers protection from damaging rays (newbalance.com).

UV Explained

The World Health Organization has named ultraviolet radiation (UV) a proven human carcinogen. "The sun not only contributes to the development of skin cancer but also aging of the skin (called photoaging), which manifests itself as undesirable sun spots, wrinkles, roughness or leathery appearance," Hale explains.

The UV spectrum comprises three forms of rays: UVA, UVB and UVC. The last is filtered out by the ozone layer and is inconsequential when it comes to skin damage. UVA categorizes the long wavelength rays that account for up to 95 percent of UV radiation. Present during all daylight hours, UVA rays can travel through glass and clouds and penetrate the deeper layers of the skin, accelerating the signs of aging.

UVB rays, 30 to 50 times less prevalent than UVA rays, are responsible for the common sunburn, and damage the superficial layers of the epidermis. The UVB peak times in the Northern Hemisphere are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., April through October. Exposure to UVB rays is a known cause of skin cancer, but recent studies suggest that UVA rays may be just as damaging.

For adequate protection from both UVA and UVB, use a sunscreen that provides broad-spectrum or multi-spectrum protection, not just a high sun protection factor (SPF). A sunscreen's SPF rating only indicates how long you can stay in the sun without getting a sunburn. For example, an SPF rating of 15 means you could stay in the sun 15 times longer with sunscreen on than without before getting burned. Keep in mind that SPF refers exclusively to UVB blockage.

To make sure you're getting broad-spectrum protection, you need a sunscreen that includes an SPF rating and some combination of long wavelength-blocking ingredients listed on the label, such as avobenzone, oxybenzone, zinc oxide, titanium dioxide or the recently FDA-approved Mexoryl. For a list of sunscreens tested and recommended by The Skin Cancer Foundation, visit skincancer.org.

Apply Early and Often

"The sun is a job hazard for those of us that love the outdoors," Kastor says. "I wear SPF 50 sunscreen no matter what my schedule or what the weather is like." Although sunscreen can't keep out 100 percent of UVB rays, when applied properly, an

SPF of 15 filters out 93 percent, SPF 30 filters out 97 percent, and SPF 50 filters out 98 percent—pretty good odds, but note the phrase *when applied properly*.

"The biggest misconception when it comes to sunscreen is underestimation," says Dr. Elizabeth Martin, of Martin Dermatology in Hoover, Ala. "People underestimate how much sunscreen they need to adequately cover their skin, and they underestimate the need for reapplying."

To get the most protection from sunscreen, follow these rules for application: Use at least one ounce—two tablespoons—of a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher; apply 30 minutes before sun exposure; and reapply every two hours or immediately after sweating or swimming. "Even so-called 'water-resistant' sunscreens may lose their effectiveness after 40 minutes in the water," Martin says.

Know the Signs of Skin Cancer

"All people, regardless of skin color, are at risk for skin cancer," Martin says. A woman doubles her propensity for developing skin cancer if she's had five or more sunburns in her life. And anyone who has more than 100 moles is at greater risk for melanoma. Other risk factors include light-colored skin, eyes and hair; personal or family history of skin cancer; use of tanning beds; or atypical moles.

To be safe, make skin cancer screening part of your yearly checkup. The deadliest form of skin cancer, melanoma, often can be identified by the signs commonly referred to as the ABCDEs:


A: The mole, spot or bump is **asymmetrical**.

B: There is an uneven or ragged **border** around it.

C: Instead of one shade, the mole is of multiple **colors**.

D: Moles are larger in **diameter** than six millimeters (the size of a pencil eraser).

E: The mole is **evolving** in shape, size, color, elevation or symptom.

If you discover any of these, see a dermatologist immediately. 

Marisa Walker is a NYC-based health and beauty writer.



Ten to Try

▶ **Burt's Bees** *Chemical-Free Sunscreen with Hemp Seed Oil* **SPF 30** This all-natural formula provides broad-spectrum UVA/UVB protection and helps keep skin hydrated. \$15, burtsbees.com

▶ **Korres** *Watermelon Sunscreen Face Cream* **SPF 30** The watermelon extract protects against photoaging and decreases redness. \$28, korres.com

▶ **Aveeno** *Continuous Protection Sunblock Spray* **SPF 70** Natural soy proteins and vitamins A, C and E combine with a photobarrier complex to help shield your skin. \$11, drugstores

▶ **Neutrogena** *Ultra Sheer Dry-Touch Sunblock* **SPF 70** A powerful blend of antioxidants and advanced sunscreen technology combat free radicals. \$9, drugstores

▶ **Banana Boat** *Sport Performance Faces Oil-Free Broad Spectrum Sunblock* **SPF 30** or *Continuous Spray Sunblock* **SPF 50** These sweat-proof, waterproof formulas are long-lasting and non-greasy. \$10 each, drugstores

▶ **Hawaiian Tropic** *Ozone Sport Sunscreen* **SPF 45+** with Zinc Oxide This sport sunscreen is formulated with zinc oxide and titanium dioxide for broad-spectrum protection. \$12, hawaiiantropic.com

▶ **Nature's Gate Organics** *Be Selective Sunscreen For Face* **SPF 30** Infused with an anti-aging complex derived from walnuts, this organic formula helps promote younger, healthier-looking skin. \$15, natures-gate.com

▶ **Guard** *SPF 65+ Spot Protection Duo Pack* This new technology uses fewer chemicals while providing a higher SPF. The oil-free, rub-resistant broad-spectrum sunscreen is enriched with vitamins A, C and E. \$10, drugstores

▶ **MD Skincare** *Powerful Sun Protection* **SPF 25 Lip Balm** This broad-spectrum lip balm is infused with blueberry and pomegranate for soft, moisturized lips. \$18, mdskincare.com

▶ **Clinique** *Lip/Eye* **SPF 30 Sun Block** This waterproof stick spot-treats the nose, lips, eyes, ears and scars with full-spectrum UVA/UVB sun protection. \$17, clinique.com

▶ **Lancome** *UV Expert 20 Sunscreen* Surprisingly lightweight and longwearing, this sunscreen goes on smooth and shields you from the rays that cause skin aging using the FDA's newest approved UVA blocker, Mexoryl. \$35, lancome-usa.com

▶ **Nature's Gate Organics** *Be Selective Sunscreen For Face* **SPF 30** Infused with an anti-aging complex derived from walnuts, this organic formula helps promote younger, healthier-looking skin. \$15, natures-gate.com