

Concerns Raised About the Potential Safety Impact of FDA-Approved Sunscreen Ingredients Being Absorbed into the Blood

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, September 17, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- SKIN: The Journal of Cutaneous Medicine®

Article: Editorial: Is Absorption of Sunscreen Truly a Problem? A Careful Review Suggests it is Not.



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Graham Litchman, DO

Skin cancers are the most common type of malignancy with over 5,000,000 that will be newly diagnosed in the US this year. Although the incidence continues to rise, all major subtypes of skin cancer are highly preventable. Proper sun protection strategies, which include consistent use of sunscreen, have been shown to have a positive impact on skin cancer prevention.

A recent paper released by the FDA suggested that measured levels of sunscreen ingredients in the bloodstream may be problematic. However, a more careful review of this study suggests otherwise. For decades, it

has been known that sunscreen is absorbed into the blood. We also know that for decades tens of millions of people use sunscreen every weekend and none of the hypothetical untoward effects suggested by the Matta study have been seen. In this newer paper, the authors express concern that misconceptions about the safety of sunscreen may increase the risk of people not using sunscreen which could lead to more cancers in the future.

Furthermore, Litchman and colleagues believe, in some cases, people may opt to forgo sunscreen while continuing to enjoy activities during peak sun-exposure rather than limiting sun exposure. This scenario, especially for those with skin types most at risk for skin cancers, may unwittingly encourage inadequate sun-exposure protection practices leading to, again, even more skin cancers in the future.

Dr. Litchman and his colleagues caution that, in their opinion, the papers by Matta et al (and related editorial by Califf and Shinkai) may be misleading to consumers looking for guidance regarding products with the best sun-protective features. People may have confusion when deciding on sunscreen formulations and look past the greater effectiveness of higher SPF for absence of specific ingredients. Although the aforementioned papers include a brief disclaimer stating that more research needs to be done, Litchman relates that "this is not adequate for preventing widespread public misconception."

Litchman also states, "We implore people to maintain healthy and effective sun-exposure protection practices and urge clinicians to reinforce what is definitively known about sunscreen: it lowers skin cancer risk."

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(DOI: [10.25251/skin.3.5.2](https://doi.org/10.25251/skin.3.5.2))

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