

This article is adapted by Westside Dermatology® from “Does Sunscreen Expire? How to Tell If Your SPF Has Gone Bad,” by Macaela Mackenzie, [Allure](#), (June 23, 2020).

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Does Sunscreen Expire?

Last summer, or the summer before, you bought a bottle of sunscreen. Take it out and look at the expiration date. Does sunscreen expire? You bet it does. Here's how to tell if your SPF is off.

"Sunscreen absolutely expires and should never be used past its expiration date," [Shari Marchbein](#), a board-certified dermatologist in New York City, says. "Like food, sunscreen can go bad and the ingredients can spoil, leading to a watery consistency," she explains. "They also become less effective, which means a significant increase in the potential for sunburns, sun damage, brown spots, and the risk for skin cancer development."

There are two main reasons you should not use expired sunscreen. One, it will not protect you. "'Expired' means that the product should no longer be expected to achieve the SPF rating stated on the container," says [Perry Romanowski](#), an independent cosmetic chemist. And that goes for both chemical and mineral sunscreens.

Chemical sunscreens that contain ingredients such as oxybenzone, avobenzone, and homosalate "can oxidize and become less effective," Romanowski explains. Mineral sunscreens — those with zinc oxide or titanium dioxide on the label — do not have that problem, but they do still degrade.

"This would include emulsion separation, graininess, preservative breakdown, color, and odor changes," Romanowski says. "So, while the sunscreen ingredient still works, it may not spread properly on the skin to get the required film that gives the protection."

That leads us to the second problem with expired sunscreen. Even if the active SPF ingredient is still technically good, changes in the formula over time can make it both ineffective and problematic for skin. "Handling of the sunscreen container with dirty hands, or frequent opening and closing can expose the sunscreen to bacteria," according to [Erin Gilbert](#), a board-certified dermatologist in New York City. As the bacteria grows in the tube, it can cause breakouts, she says.

Now some sunscreen “do’s”:

Number one: You're wearing it year-round. *Number two:* You're applying it everywhere — even your eyelids. *Number three:* You're wearing a high SPF sunscreen for optimal protection. And finally, you are using sunscreen that is still fresh.