The History of Sunscreen

It’s fun to play in the summer sun, but it’s important to keep your skin safe! What have people used to protect their skin over the years?
Before Sunscreen

Thousands of years ago, sunscreen hadn’t been invented yet, and people used something else to block the sun: umbrellas!

At first, umbrellas weren’t for everyone, and only royalty like kings and queens were allowed to use them in ancient Egypt! But by the 1800s, a lot of people had them. Many people used light, fancy umbrellas called parasols.

The First Sunscreen

Umbrellas worked, but only if you stayed under them. People needed a way to keep their skin safe if they were moving around!

In 1944, Benjamin Green had an idea. He kept getting painful sunburns, so he came up with the idea of putting something on your skin to protect it from the sun. This is how sunscreen was born!

As You Read

Think about why sun protection today is better than sun protection long ago.

It’s gooey. It’s slippery. It takes forever to sink into your skin. Sunscreen may seem annoying, but we should be grateful we have it! It wasn’t always so easy to protect your skin from the sun.

Make sure to get sunscreen on those hard-to-reach places!

Sun Safety Through the Years

Long Ago

Sunscreen didn’t exist yet! People used umbrellas to block the sun.

1920s–1970s

Some people didn’t want to block the sun. They used shiny boards to get suntans!
and he wanted to prevent them. He put a thick goo on his skin. While it kept his skin safe from the sun, it was heavy and greasy.

People didn’t like wearing it, but Green kept trying. He mixed up a lotion on his kitchen stove and tested it on his bald head! He added cocoa butter and coconut oil to it. Finally, he had something that smelled good and felt better on people’s skin. It was the first sunscreen!

**Trying to Get a Tan**

In the late 1940s and the 1950s, more companies started to make sunscreens. But the sunscreens were only about SPF 2 or SPF 4, so they didn’t protect people’s skin very well.

Some people didn’t want to block the sun at all. They wanted suntans! They put oil on their skin that helped them get tanner. Some people even used shiny boards to reflect more sun onto their skin!

Back then, people thought suntans were healthy. But today, doctors know they aren’t very good for your skin.

**Sunscreen Today**

Now we know a lot more about how to keep our skin safe. We know that you should wear sunscreen that’s SPF 30 or higher. We know that you need to reapply it every two hours and after you go in the water. We know that everyone needs to wear sunscreen.

From umbrellas for kings to greasy goo to SPF 30, sun protection has come a long way. Aren’t you glad we have sunscreen today? —by Blair Rainsford