

From: "Boulder Ayurveda" <varadaanbiz@comcast.net>
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To: "" <varadaanmisc@comcast.net>
Reply-To: "Boulder Ayurveda" <varadaanbiz@comcast.net>

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SUMMER 2011

It's summer in the Northern Hemisphere, and we all need to think about the Sun, that fiery ball that powers our corner of the universe. I have discovered there is a story about sunscreens that many people don't know about. So in this issue of Boulder Ayurveda's seasonal newsletter, you will have an opportunity to learn the very important truth about sunscreens in the USA, and more detail about UVA, UVB, and vitamin D. Summer is the season that we get to put our skin into direct contact with nature, with the wind and the Sun. Many of us protect ourselves with compounds; some are nontoxic, but many products are a veritable stew of chemicals, some with names that cannot be pronounced.



In this Issue from Boulder Ayurveda

- **Class: Intro to Ayurveda**
Sept 15 - Nov 17
- **The truth about sunscreens**
- **Important organic foods**

Prepared for your wellness
by VARADAAN

Sunscreens

Now we turn to the substances that we absorb through our skin. A new concern arising in prescient health circles is the issue of hormone disrupting chemicals. Concerns are emerging about BPA in Tupperware, but those familiar with the issue know that almost every plastic can be found to contain hormone disruptors, if not BPA, than some other substance which may be worse for a given individual. It is likely that in the developed world, the era of microwaving in plastic may be soon coming to a close. For that matter the little receipts we get on every purchase which use BPA as a developing chemical, they may be damaging to your health, and should be handled with care.

For some this will not be a surprise: sunscreen compounds with less exotic chemicals are probably better for your

Photo by Jonathan Machen

CHEMISTRY & YOUR SKIN

Ayurveda teaches that the skin is a digestive organ. It is through the skin that we assimilate substances, such as the vitamin D that the skin produces through bhrajaka pitta, in response to the Sun's loving touch. So, Ayurvedic products and remedies that are applied to the skin are edible; they are not toxic if accidentally consumed orally; typical formulation are herbs that are consumed internally, and oils that may be used in cooking. Likewise, on the subject of food, Ayurveda recommends high quality, doshically appropriate foods. Food should not contain dirt, poison, or non-food items. Food should be readily assimilated through agni, the metabolic digestive fire. In fact, in Ayurveda, quality of food metabolism is considered to be the primary factor for health. For this reason, those wishing to live full, long lives are wise to avoid contaminated food. In modern times this means clean high quality foods, but also foods that are not genetically modified and that do not contain high levels of pesticides or heavy metals. So, in this newsletter there is a link to the Environmental Working Group's very convenient list of foods that are a) more likely to be contaminated with pesticides, and therefore should be sought from the organic aisle, and b) those fruits

health. Zinc and titanium are more stable and offer better UVA protection, a key failure of many products sold in the USA. If you don't like the mineral products, the Environmental Working Group (EWG) recommends sunscreens with avobenzone at 3 percent for the best UVA protection. Notorious hormone disruptors oxybenzone and 4-MBC should not be put on children, or for that matter, people or animals, algae, coral. . .

The EWG has released a report with much detail about these issues, and is also rating sunscreen products annually. I recommend visiting their website, see the links at the end of this article.

The best offense is a good defense. Start by wearing a hat and protective clothing, stay in the shade if possible, and avoid the strongest rays of the day.

Understand that in addition to the environmental consequences of manufacturing, and the potential health considerations, sunscreens may have significant environmental impacts, especially on aquatic beings. These photo-blocking compounds can literally smother corals, lingering for long periods in the environment. I now prefer an old wetsuit when swimming in the ocean, not just for comfort with respect to temperature, but because that means a lot less waterproof sunscreen goes into the water.

[Click here for a bit more about this aspect, courtesy of the Washington Post.](#)

OK, so to catch up on what you need to know about sunscreens, here are some more surprising data bits. In addition to the fact that many sunscreens contain compounds that could affect human hormones and reproductive functions, a common ingredient, Vitamin A, found in approximately 30% of sunscreens, may actually increase the speed of tumor

and vegetables which have relatively low pesticide residues, and therefore are less important targets for your organic food budget dollars. It's nice to know when pesticide concentrations are less of a concern.

Visit: <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/> to get your chart.

I guess the message we are starting to learn, is that in general simpler is better. If something seems overly complicated, then it probably is. Examples include the recent understanding about the dangers of teflon cookware and flame retardant chemicals, the hazards of imprudent antibiotics use, or this recent information about what in the United States is an unregulated cosmetics and sunscreen industry all. Now we are learning that those who switched from polycarbonate to aluminum water bottles, to avoid the estrogen mimicking BPA, may not be out of the woods: epoxy resins coating the bottles can leach BPA into even cold water.* As consumers, we should all support production of goods that can rapidly and safely degrade in biological systems, those things which are simple to produce and simple to resolve to their non-toxic components. Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, is poised to become quite fashionable, as its teachings are perhaps even more relevant in this time when human beings must coexist harmoniously with their world. The ancient Vedic five element theory, as developed into Ayurveda, offers simple, common-sense

formation in the presence of sunlight, according to a recent FDA study. Look for Vitamin A as "retinyl palmitate" or "retino". Note that the hormone disruptor 4-MBC may be listed as an "inactive ingredient" — though a common ingredient, it is not allowed to be considered an "active ingredient" by the FDA.

Here's more: as we are now in the 34th summer season without safety regulations on sunscreens, note that Europe has better laws and better products. European manufacturers have more chemicals to choose from, 27 vs 17 in the U.S., and have more UVA filters, 7 substances vs 3 in the United States. Euro-lotions could receive FDA's proposed top rating of four stars, but US products would get only three. Chemicals available in Europe but not FDA approved, provide up to five times more UVA protection. Remember: UVB causes the burn, but UVA causes DNA damage. This may be partly why we have the following startling data: sunscreens may actually increase the risk of the deadliest skin cancer for some people. Some of this may be the combination of misleading SPF numbers and poor UVA protection, leading some individuals to put themselves in danger while thinking they are protected. Many ingredients actually break down quickly in sunlight — frequent re-application is important. And to cap it off, the bottom line is that among experts, there is no agreement on whether sunscreens actually prevent cancer. So, to recap, look for titanium, zinc or avobenzone in your sunscreens. Stay in the shade, if possible, especially if you are fair skinned or have a family history of skin cancers. Ten minutes of exposure, several times a week may be sufficient to produce the vitamin D you need (AMA 2008), note that your bhrajak pitta, the agni in your skin, might need 24

solutions to even the complex problems of our modern times, and even has a great deal to add on topics of health, longevity and wellness. Without toxic byproducts.

Ayurveda can be thought of as an early science of Sustainability. Check out the model for 'Sustainable Culture'** which builds on ancient metaphysical principles. We all want to live long lives, make positive contributions, and be gentle with the Earth. So should we expect products we buy to meet the same standards. Learn to repair things when possible, instead of discarding and buying new. Learn to heal yourself naturally before engaging the resource intensive industry of modern medicine. And then, don't be afraid to face the moment when that favorite object really does need to be replaced, or it really is time to see the surgeon. Then pick wisely. It is all just the dance of maya, which ultimately, is to be enjoyed, but in accordance with your dharma, to work your karma.

*At <http://www.enviroblog.org/> check "*Think your Water Bottle is "BPA Free"? Better double check.*" JULY 14, 2011

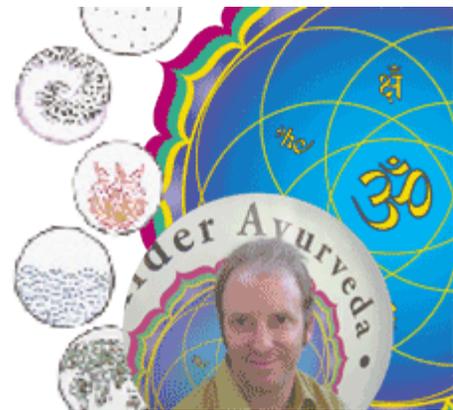
**Check out <http://www.sustainability.org>

hours to fully process sunlight into vitamins – showering may interrupt the process; or take supplements – vitamin D is essential for wellness.

Some links to the EWG website:

- [best-beach-sport-sunscreens](#)
- [hall-of-shame-whats-wrong-with-the-sunscreen-protection-business](#)
- [sunscreens-exposed-9-surprising-truths](#)

The EWG also has a good exploration of toxic compounds found in cosmetics in general – an important topic in its own right. Tell your friends.



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302 Pearl St
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