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### [Gisele's sunscreen dig only skin deep](#)

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So they say . . . sunscreen is poison. By they, we mean Brazilian bombshell Gisele Bundchen. The 30-year-old supermodel sparked a controversy when she exclaimed she never uses sunscreen because "I cannot put this poison on my skin."

You might easily dismiss her comments. They were, after all, made at an event in which she was launching her own line of organic skin care products (including a chemical-free sunscreen). She also backed away from her comments, too.

"I do use sunblock, but also I try my best not to be exposed to the sun when it is too strong," she clarified on her blog. "I definitely know the importance of using sunscreen and I try to look for more natural options."

Is there anything to her initial statement, though?

"Poison is kind of a strong word," says Barrington-based dermatologist Dr. Amy Derick. "Some sunscreen is better than no sunscreen. Unprotected sun exposure is far more poisonous than sunscreen."

The watchdog organization the Environmental Working Group isn't so sure.

"We won't come out and call it a poison, but we do encourage people to look at the ingredients in their sunscreen," says Sonya Lunder, senior analyst for the EWG.

Lunder says that chief among the questionable ingredients found in many sunscreens is oxybenzone.

"Oxybenzone penetrates the skin and, once in your bloodstream, can act like a hormone disrupter and cause unintended toxic effects," Lunder says.

The cosmetic industry and dermatologists don't agree with EWG's findings on the chemical.

"The American Academy of Dermatology Association is a fairly conservative group," Derick says. "Oxybenzone is one of the common ingredients in many sunscreens. If it was proven to be toxic or

cancerous, the Academy and every dermatologist would recommend not using it. The lab results don't back up the claims right now.

Another popular sunscreen ingredient is a form of Vitamin A called retinyl palmitate. Lunder says that too is suspect.

Retinyl palmitate isn't an ultra-violet ray blocker, it's added for other cosmetic reasons, she says. In our lab tests, 40 percent of mice that had UV exposure while wearing a cream containing retinyl palmitate got more tumors than mice that had UV exposure without any sunscreen.

And while the cosmetic industry also takes issues with their findings on retinyl palmitate, Lunder says the National Center for Toxicology Research confirmed their findings.

The EWG also is suspicious of any sunscreen claiming to be a "sunblocker" as sunscreens are measured in how well they block UVB rays.

So, sunscreens are great for preventing sunburns from UVB overexposure, but we really have no way of measuring how effective they are at preventing UVA exposure because the effects of UVA damage become apparent over time, Lunder says.

The FDA isn't exactly helping things, either. They have been studying sunscreens for 30 years and have yet to issue final regulations.

In 2007, the Food and Drug Administration published draft regulations that would prohibit companies from labeling products with a sunburn protection factor (SPF) higher than SPF 50, noting "there was no assurance that the specific values themselves were in fact truthful."

The FDA was supposed to issue new guidelines regarding the marketing and labeling of sunscreens in October, but that never happened. Calls to the FDA were not returned.

Derick and Lunder did agree on one point, though.

The best sunscreen is really a hat and covering up, Lunder says.

Clothing provides an SPF of 50, adds Derick, "Plus, unlike sunscreen, you don't need to keep reapplying it."

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