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This Reddit User Learned the Hard Way That Expired Sunscreen Doesn't Protect Your Skin

They said their sunburn was "easily one of the most painful things" they'd ever experienced.



If you play with fire, you're going to get burned. The same rules apply to [sunscreens](#), a lesson Reddit user u/springchikun learned when they unknowingly used expired sunscreen to [protect their skin](#) on a day trip to the lake.

"I pretty much had no idea that I had a problem until I scratched an itch on my back and it hurt really bad," [they wrote in a post](#) in the [r/TIFU community](#).

By the next day, blisters had formed over u/springchikun's severely burned skin. To ease the pain, they went to the doctor for medication and a check-up.

"It was easily one of the most painful things I have ever experienced. Except when my tank top straps got dried to my blisters on my shoulders and became part of the blister scabs overnight," they explained in the post. "Trying to pull them off was almost blackout pain. I soaked in a tub for a while until they basically melted off."

"Please go to a doctor or emergency center today. That's a really bad burn, even by sunburn standards. You need professional medical care," commented one Redditor. "Oh my god I hope you feel better soon. Did you go to a hospital? Gosh that must be so painful. Best wishes to you," said another.

Other Redditors warned against using sunscreen that's been expired. The formula u/springchikun applied was anywhere from four to five years old, they wrote.

"Always buy new sunscreen every year," advised one commenter. "Even if you bought it just one year ago—if there's no expiration date on the bottle consider it expired, just to be safe," added another.

What to Know About Sunscreen Expiration

This very unfortunate situation could have been prevented had u/springchikun realized their sunscreen was expired. However, unless you keep tabs on when/how long ago you bought a can or tube of sunscreen, it's not always easy to tell if the formula you're using is past its shelf life. (Here's [why sunscreen may not be enough to protect your skin](#).)

Sunscreen manufacturers typically print the product's expiration date on "the backs of bottles or the crimp end of tubes," says [Hadley King, M.D.](#), a NYC-based dermatologist. But while this may be true for some packaging, sometimes a less obvious set of numbers is embossed on the top of the plastic bottle,

adds [Sheel Desai Solomon, M.D.](#), a board-certified dermatologist based in North Carolina. "If you see 15090 on a sunscreen bottle, that would mean the expiration date was: manufactured in 2015 in the 90th day of the year," explains Dr. Desai Solomon.

That being said, when u/springchikun called the sunscreen brand's customer service line, they were met with a recording that said [the FDA doesn't require expiration dates on sunblock](#), and that customers should "consider [any sunscreen] expired after three years," [they wrote in their post](#). So while your sunscreen *might* have an expiration date to reference, there's also a chance it won't have one at all.

To be safe, it's best to buy new sunscreen at the start of every spring/summer season, or before sunny travel, says [Rita V. Linkner, M.D.](#), a board-certified dermatologist at Spring Street Dermatology in New York. Some signs of sunblock expiration include changes to color and consistency, but these can be extremely difficult to spot, says Dr. Desai Solomon.

At this time, there's not enough evidence to determine whether using expired sunscreen puts you at high risk for a burn, explains Dr. Linkner. Clearly in u/springchikun's case, though, it didn't help. Judging by the level of redness, swelling, and blistering in the photo, u/springchikun likely suffered a second-degree burn, Dr. King estimates.

How to Treat a Second-Degree Sunburn

As soon as you realize you've been burned, your first order of business should be to get out of the sun ASAP, says dermatologist [Deanne Robinson, M.D.](#) Next, because second-degree burns like u/springchikun's can be severe, it's best to seek professional medical attention immediately. This way, the treating physician can prescribe a topical cream to help fight infection, explains Dr. Robinson. You can also take ibuprofen to help reduce pain and inflammation. But whatever you do, "do *not* pop your own blisters, as they can get infected," she warns.

You can also ease the pain of a second-degree sunburn by taking a cool shower with gentle soap, using a moisturizer that contains aloe vera or soy to rehydrate the skin, and drinking plenty of liquids to bring fluids back into the body. Another tip: Try dabbing a towel dipped in milk or plain yogurt on the affected area to help it heal, suggests Dr. King. "The fat content of milk cleanses and moisturizes, but can hold in heat," she explains, meaning it's best to start with a fat-free milk, then switch to full-fat milk "as the active phase of the sunburn resolves and the dry and peeling phase begins," she says. "The enzymes provide gentle exfoliation, and the proteins, vitamins, and minerals are anti-inflammatory." (See: [Sunburn Remedies to Soothe Scorched Skin](#))

Overall, u/springchikun had the right idea; they just didn't execute it properly. "I applied SPF 100 sport spray, every hour (give or take) for roughly four hours," they wrote in their post.

But there are other [best practices for sun protection](#) aside from reapplying sunscreen (that isn't expired).

"We need a 360-degree strategy that takes into account what we put into our body, our lifestyle, and all forms of light exposure," *Shape* Brain Trust member, Mona Gohara, M.D., a dermatologist in New Haven, Connecticut, [previously told us](#). This means going the extra mile to eat a diet rich in vitamin B3 (which helps the body naturally repair DNA that's been damaged by the sun), applying sunscreen on your hands, arms, and face before driving, and tracking how much time you spend in the sun to get a better idea of how it affects your skin.

If you don't trust the experts, trust u/springchikun: This is not the type of burn you want to feel. Protect your skin as best as you can.

<https://www.shape.com/lifestyle/mind-and-body/sunburn-expired-sunscreen-reddit>