

# Herbal Powder Sunscreens: Exploring Plant-Based Alternatives to Synthetic Formulations in UV Protection

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**ABSTRACT:** Sunscreens are essential for protecting the skin from harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation, particularly UVA and UVB, which are associated with sunburn, premature aging, DNA damage, and an increased risk of skin cancer. Conventional creams and lotions have limitations, including greasiness, the need for frequent reapplication, the use of chemical preservatives, the risk of skin irritation, and environmental impact. Herbal powder sunscreens have emerged as a promising option because they combine plant-derived bioactive chemicals in a lightweight, non-greasy composition that provides adequate solar protection while decreasing chemical exposure. This research lists major herbal compounds commonly found in sunscreen powder formulations, including Clitoriaternatea (butterfly pea flower), Aloe vera, Tulsi, green tea extract, turmeric, licorice, sandalwood, red raspberry, neem, Multani Mitti, rose petal powder, and rice powder. These compounds have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, UV protection, and skin-soothing qualities. However, research on herbal sunscreen powders is limited, particularly in terms of formulation stability, clinical efficacy, and scalability in production. Future research should focus on optimizing ingredient combinations, ensuring safety, and creating stable, commercially viable products. Herbal powder sunscreens are a sustainable, natural, and skin-friendly alternative to traditional synthetic sunscreens.

**KEYWORDS:** Herbal sunscreen, Photo-protection, Antioxidant, Natural Skincare.

## I. INTRODUCTION

UV radiation is a huge hazard to worldwide skin health, including premature aging, uneven pigmentation, and an increased risk of skin cancer. Extended exposure to UVA and UVB radiation hastens photoaging, resulting in wrinkles, reduced skin suppleness, and hyperpigmentation. Furthermore, UV-induced DNA damage increases the incidence of both melanoma and non-melanoma skin malignancies. Epidemiological research

suggests that UV-related skin problems are becoming more common around the world, especially in areas with significant sun exposure. These changes highlight the urgent need for adequate photoprotective measures. [2] Although various studies have investigated the photoprotective and antioxidant properties of herbal extracts in cream and lotion formulations, their use in powder-based sunscreen systems is mostly unknown. Based on known approaches for emulsion formulations, a conceptual approach is provided for adapting comparable strategies to powder formulations. This conceptual framework is intended to guide future experimental studies in the development of stable, effective, and user-friendly herbal sunscreen powders, thereby expanding current knowledge beyond liquid/cream systems to dry powder applications.

## 1. Basics of Sunscreens

### 1.1 Mechanism of UV protection (UVA, UVB, UVC)

#### Effects of UV radiation on the skin layer:

Sunlight has a range ranging from ultraviolet (UV) to visible light. Ultraviolet radiation is divided into three types based on wavelength:

- UVA- wavelengths range from 320-400 nm
- UVB- from 290-320 nm
- UVC- from 100-290 nm

**A. UVA** has the longest wavelength of all UV radiation, allowing it to penetrate deep into the skin and reach the dermis. Prolonged exposure can cause skin darkening, premature aging, and wrinkles.

**B. UVB** rays have shorter wavelengths and predominantly harm the epidermis, with only a tiny percentage reaching the dermis. UVB is responsible for sunburn and can cause DNA damage in skin cells.

**C. UVC** rays have the shortest wavelength and are virtually completely absorbed by the Earth's ozone layer, thus they do not reach the skin. [2] [7] [12]

## 1.2 Sunscreen Modalities: Physical, Chemical, and Phytochemical Approaches

**1) Physical (Mineral) Sunscreens-** contain active mineral compounds such as zinc oxide or titanium dioxide, which reflect and scatter UV light from the skin's surface. They offer broad-spectrum protection and are typically less irritating to sensitive skin.

**2) Chemical (Synthetic) Sunscreens-** These contain organic chemicals such as avobenzone, octocrylene, and oxybenzone, which absorb UV light and turn it into safe heat. They are often lighter on the skin and used in daily cosmetic formulations.

**3) Herbal (Natural) Sunscreens-** Use plant-derived extracts high in antioxidants and UV-absorbing substances, such as aloe vera, green tea, or coconut extract, to provide mild UV protection as well as additional skin benefits like anti-inflammatory and anti-aging properties. [8] [9] [12]

## 1.3 Limitations of conventional synthetic sunscreens

Although traditional chemical sunscreens are excellent at protecting against UVA and UVB rays, they have many disadvantages. Skin irritation, allergic reactions, and photosensitivity can all occur as a result of frequent use. Some chemical filters have been linked to systemic absorption, raising questions regarding long-term safety. Furthermore, these sunscreens may have a substantial environmental impact, particularly on marine ecosystems, because some chemicals such as oxybenzone and octinoxate contribute to coral bleaching and reef damage. These disadvantages have sparked increased interest in safer, more environmentally friendly alternatives, such as mineral and herbal sunscreens.

## 2. Powder Sunscreen Formulations

### 2.1 Powder Sunscreens: A Distinct Alternative to Cream and Lotion Formulations.

Powder sunscreens are a new type of photoprotective formulation that provides broad-spectrum UV protection in a dry, particle form. Unlike traditional cream and lotion sunscreens, which are emulsion-based (oil-in-water or water-in-oil systems), powder sunscreens use micronized or nanoparticle UV filters that are mixed into a free-flowing powder basis.

### Key Features of Powder Sunscreens:

#### 1) Formulation Base

**Powder:** Composed of crude pharmaceuticals such as clitoratearnea, which are frequently mixed with natural minerals.

**Creams/Lotions:** Typically contain oil, water, and emulsifiers, along with chemical or physical UV filters.

#### 2) Mode of Application

**Powder:** Applied with a brush or puff for a lightweight, matte finish. Ideal for oily or acne-prone skin, and may be easily reapplied over makeup.

**Creams/Lotions:** Spread straight onto the skin, which typically results in a greasy or occlusive coating.

#### 3) Aesthetic & Functional Advantages

Powders are non-greasy, portable, and enhance cosmetic acceptance.

Pore clogging risk is reduced when compared to heavy creams.

Their ease of reapplication makes them suitable for daily use.

#### 4) Stability and Shelf Life

Powders are often more stable since they are anhydrous (without water) and less susceptible to microbial contamination.

Creams and lotions may need preservatives to prevent microbial growth.

#### 5) Limitations

It may be hard to get uniform coverage, which could leave gaps in UV protection.

Lower SPF ratings are frequently reported compared to well-formulated creams and lotions.

Sweat and humidity have the potential to remove or spread it.

#### Conclusion

Powder sunscreens are a viable solution for people looking for lightweight, portable, and cosmetically appealing sun protection. However, their efficiency is strongly reliant on formulation quality, particle dispersion, and correct application. They are best viewed as a supplement rather than a full substitute for traditional cream or lotion-based sunscreens.

## 2.2 Conceptual Framework for Herbal Powder Sunscreen Formulation

### Method 1: Crude Plant Powder-Based Sunscreen Formulation

Since standardized protocols for herbal powder sunscreens are not yet available, a conceptual approach can be outlined. Herbal

powders with reported antioxidant and photo-protective activity—such as **green tea, turmeric, moringa, aloe vera, sandalwood, or clitoriaternatea, liquorice, neem, red raspberry, clitoriaternatea**—can be selected as the active components. These powders are blended with natural carriers like rice starch, arrowroot, or cosmetic clay to improve flow, texture, and skin adherence. The mixture is homogenized, sieved to obtain fine uniform particles, and then packed into suitable dosage forms such as loose powder jars, compact pans, or brush-dispensing containers. This method represents a theoretical framework highlighting the feasibility of herbal powder sunscreens, though experimental studies are required to evaluate their actual SPF and clinical effectiveness.

Plant Material  
↓ (Drying)  
Dried Plant Material  
↓ (Grinding)  
Crude Powder  
↓ (Optional: Sieve to uniform particle size)  
Ready-to-Use Herbal Sunscreen Powder

#### Method 2: Crude Powder-Enriched Extract Sunscreen Formulation (Powder Base Version)

In this method, the plant material is first dried and ground into a fine **crude powder**, containing all its natural constituents. To enhance the concentration of active compounds and improve sunscreen efficacy, a **plant extract** is prepared from the same plant and carefully incorporated into the crude powder. After thorough mixing, the combined mixture is **dried again** to obtain a uniform, stable **extract-enriched powder**.

This process ensures that the **active ingredients from the plant** are effectively transferred into the powder base, reducing bulkiness and improving powder consistency. Compared to conventional crude powder sunscreen, this **enhanced powder** provides:

- **Higher UV protection** due to concentrated actives.
- **Better antioxidant activity** for reducing skin damage.
- **Improved stability and homogeneity**, preventing clumping or settling.
- **Optimized texture** for cosmetic use, making it easier to apply and more effective on the skin.

Plant Material  
↓ (Drying)  
Dried Plant Material  
↓ (Grinding)  
Crude Powder  
↓ (Prepare Plant Extract from same plant)  
Plant Extract  
↓ (Mix thoroughly with Crude Powder)  
Extract-Enriched Powder  
↓ (Dry the mixture to remove solvent/moisture)  
Final Stable Powder Base  
↓ (Optional: Sieve to uniform particle size)  
Ready-to-Use Herbal Sunscreen Powder

#### 2.3 Stability of Plant Extracts in Powder Form

Plant extracts can remain active in powder formulations if they are freeze-dried or spray-dried and stored in airtight, light-protective containers. While sensitive components (such as vitamin C and flavonoids) may deteriorate in the presence of heat or moisture, powdered extracts often preserve their antioxidant and calming qualities. Importantly, when applied directly to the skin, the active ingredients are progressively released upon contact with sweat, sebum, or lotion, increasing their functional activity in sunscreen formulations with mineral UV filters.

### 3. Plant-Based UV Protective Agents

#### 3.1 Plants with natural UV-absorbing phytochemicals

Certain plants have bioactive chemicals that can absorb UV radiation and provide photoprotection. These phytochemicals, which include flavonoids, phenolic acids, coumarins, and carotenoids, can neutralize reactive oxygen species (ROS) produced by UV radiation, decreasing DNA damage, photoaging, and pigmentation. Plant-based chemicals are increasingly being investigated as natural alternatives in sunscreen compositions. [6]

#### 3.2 Herbal ingredients commonly used for sun protection:

##### A) Green tea :-( *Camellia sinensis*)

Family: - Theaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient: - EGCG, Catechins

Uses: Antioxidant, UV protection, anti-aging

##### B) Aloe Vera: - (*Aloe barbadensis*)

Family: - Asphodelaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient: - Polysaccharides, Vitamins C & E

Uses: - Soothing, moisturizing, UV protection [13]

### C) Turmeric :-( *Curcuma longa*)

Family: - Zingiberaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient: - Curcumin

Uses: - Anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, skin brightening

### D) Clitoria Ternatea (Butterfly pea)

Family: - Fabaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient - Anthocyanins, Flavonoids

Uses: - Antioxidant, photo protection, skin soothing

### E) Sandalwood (*Santalum album*)

Family: - Santalaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient: - Santalol, Flavonoids

Uses: Anti-inflammatory, skin brightening, photo protection

### F) Liquorice :-( *Glycyrrhiza glabra*)

Family: - fabaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient: - Glycyrrhiza, glabra

Uses: Depigmentation, antioxidant, UV protection

### G) Neem (*Azadirachta indica*)

Family: - Meliaceae

Active Photoprotective Ingredient - Nimbidin, Flavonoids

Uses: Antimicrobial, antioxidant, UV protection

### H) Rice Powder (*Oryza sativa*)

Family: - Poaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient: - Ferulic acid, Phenolics, Vitamins

Uses: Oil control, UV protection, antioxidant

### I) Red raspberry :-( *Rubus idaeus*)

Family: - Rosaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient: - Ellagic acid, Anthocyanins

Uses: Antioxidant, UV protection, anti-aging [11]

### J) Moringa- (*Moringa oleifera*)

Family- Moringaceae

Active Photo Protective Ingredient- Flavonoids, Vitamins A, C, E

Uses: Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory

## 4. Methods to Evaluate Herbal Sunscreen

### Efficacy

Herbal powder sunscreens are dry formulations containing plant extracts or phytochemicals that provide UV protection. Evaluating their efficacy requires assessing UV-

blocking ability, photo stability, antioxidant activity, and skin compatibility. The methods are slightly adapted compared to creams or lotions because powders need activation by moisture, sebum, or sweat when applied on the skin.

### 1. In Vitro Methods

#### • UV Spectrophotometry:

- Powder is dispersed in a suitable medium or solvent.
- UV absorbance is measured in the **290–400 nm range**.
- **SPF estimation** can be done using **Mansur's equation**.

#### • Diffuse Reflectance Spectroscopy:

- Measures **UV reflection and absorption** directly from the powder layer.
- Useful for **compact or loose powder formulations**.

#### • Photo stability Testing:

- Powder is exposed to UV light to check **retention of photo-protective compounds**.

#### • Antioxidant Assays (DPPH, ABTS, FRAP):

- Evaluates **free radical scavenging activity**, which contributes to **indirect photo protection**.

### 2. In Vivo / Human Skin Models

#### • Minimal Erythema Dose (MED) Test:

- Powder applied on human skin.
- After **activation with sweat, sebum, or water**, the **lowest UV dose causing erythema** is determined.

#### • SPF Determination on Skin:

- Powder is applied in a **standardized amount (mg/cm<sup>2</sup>)**.
- SPF is calculated based on **MED comparison with unprotected skin**.

#### • Patch Tests for Irritation:

- Ensures the powder **does not cause allergic reactions** or skin irritation.

### 3. Instrumental / Analytical Methods

#### • Tape Stripping + UV Measurement:

- Measures **retention and uniform distribution** of powder on the stratum corneum.

#### • Particle Size Analysis:

- Determines if powder **forms a uniform UV-blocking layer** on skin.

#### • HPLC / LC-MS Analysis:

- Quantifies **active phytochemicals** responsible for UV protection.

#### 4. Special Considerations for Powder Sunscreens

- **Activation by Moisture:**
  - Powder requires **contact with sweat, sebum, or lotion** for active ingredient release.
  - Evaluation methods must simulate **skin conditions** for accurate efficacy measurement.
- **Spread ability and Adherence:**
  - Tests ensure powder **forms uniform coverage**, which affects SPF and UVA protection.
- **Stability Studies:**
  - Powder should retain activity during **storage, temperature changes, and humidity**.

#### 5. Advantages of Herbal Powder Sunscreen

- **Safer and less irritating** - When compared to synthetic sunscreens, they are often gentler on the skin and better suited to delicate skin.
- **High in antioxidants** - Protects skin from oxidative stress and free radical damage caused by UV exposure.
- **Anti-inflammatory Properties** – Reduces redness, irritation, and inflammation caused by sun exposure.
- **Photoprotective Effects** - Flavonoids, polyphenols, and carotenoids are natural chemicals that provide broad-spectrum UV protection.
- **Anti-aging benefits** - Include preventing wrinkles, fine lines, and loss of skin suppleness caused by photoaging
- **Environmentally Friendly** – Biodegradable and less harmful to aquatic ecosystems compared to chemical sunscreens
- **Soothing Effect** - Ingredients such as aloe vera and rose have cooling and calming properties for sun-exposed skin.
- **Multi-functional** - In one formulation, it can operate as a moisturizer, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and UV protectant

#### 6. Limitations and Challenges

- **Uneven UV Protection** – Difficult to achieve uniform coverage, reducing effectiveness.
- **Reduced Water Resistance** – Loses efficacy with sweat, sebum, or water contact.
- **Frequent Reapplication Needed** – Shorter wear time compared to creams or lotions.
- **Stability and Skin Type Limitations** – Active ingredients may degrade in powder form; may not suit very dry or mature skin.

#### 7. Future Perspectives

Herbal sunscreen powders have significant potential as a safe, natural alternative to synthetic sunscreens. Future research could concentrate on improving broad-spectrum UV protection, increasing the stability and controlled release of active compounds using sophisticated formulation processes, and creating multifunctional products with moisturizing, anti-aging, and skin-brightening properties. Addressing issues like as water resistance and consistent application will improve their effectiveness and consumer acceptance. With the growing need for eco-friendly skincare, herbal sunscreen powders are projected to gain popularity in cosmetic and pharmaceutical products.

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