



TANNING BEDS

What bad can come from a tanning booth?

The truth about artificial tanning

If the promise of a “healthy sun-kissed glow” sounds tempting, we urge you to think twice before going to the tanning bed. Here we address some of the common myths surrounding artificial tanning.

Myth #1: “I can get a healthy tan from the tanning bed”

While tanning beds may claim to offer a “safe tan,” the truth of the matter is, there is no such thing as a “safe tan.” Ultraviolet (UV) rays, whether from the sun or the tanning bed, damage your skin. Your skin then reacts in self-defense by producing more of the pigment melanin, resulting in a tan. Over time, repeated exposure to UV rays damages the skin, causing premature skin aging, with damaged skin appearing dry, wrinkled, and leathery. Overexposure to UV rays can also cause eye injury, rashes and inflammations, and increases your chances of developing a skin cancer.

Furthermore, there is nothing about a tanning bed’s UV rays that will prevent you from burning, just as you would in natural sunlight. The images below, taken from media reports of two teenagers severely burned by artificial tanning, illustrate the potential harms of the tanning bed.

Myth #2: “My tanning bed only uses UVA rays, which are safer than UVB rays”

UVA and UVB rays both damage the skin. UVB rays harm the surface of the skin, while UVA rays penetrate to deeper layers. Both types of UV

radiation burn skin, its just that UVA rays burn deeper, and therefore actually leave skin susceptible to damage longer than UVB rays.



When bad things happen at the tanning bed: a 13 year old young man (left) and 14 year old young woman (right) both sustained severe burns, requiring hospitalization, after too long of an artificial tanning session.

Myth #3: “The tanning bed will get rid of my cellulite”

Cellulite may be less noticeable when you have a tan, but UV rays damage and thin the skin. This damage decreases skin’s resiliency, such that when your tan fades existing cellulite actually looks worse.

Myth #4: “The tanning bed cures my acne”

Oftentimes, skin will respond to the drying effects of UV rays by overproducing sebum which can clog pores and make acne worse. Worse yet, UV rays can darken existing acne scars, as well as cause your acne to scar a darker color.

Myth #5: “Getting a base tan from the tanning bed will protect me from getting a sunburn when I’m outside”

The UV rays from the tanning bed thin the skin, making it less able to heal itself, and therefore

actually more susceptible to damage from the sun. Furthermore, because the UVA rays of the tanning bed are deeply penetrating, skin remains vulnerable longer.

Myth #6: “I don’t need to wear goggles in the tanning bed because I cover my face with a towel”

UVA rays can burn the cornea, and overtime can cause alterations in lens structure that lead to cataracts. Furthermore, too much UV exposure can damage your retina. Untreated, these consequence of UV damage to the eye can result in blindness. Closing your eyes, covering your face with a towel, or wearing sunglasses are not sufficient to protect your eyes from the tanning bed’s UV radiation; therefore, the USA Food and Drug Administration requires tanning parlor/salon owners to ask and provide all customers with protective eye wear.

References:

1. BBC. Boy burned in tanning salon visit. BBC News [serial on the Internet]. 2008: Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/south_east/7341450.stm.
2. BBC. Girl, 14, burned in tanning salon. BBC News [serial on the Internet]. 2009: Available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/wales/7899199.stm?lss.

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