

Tanning Health Risks

People who use tanning beds before age 35 increase their melanoma risk by 75 percent.

Skin cancer is among the most common forms of cancer in the United States.

It is estimated that one in five Americans will develop the disease, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVA and UVB rays) from the sun or from indoor tanning devices is a major risk factor for most skin cancers, which can be deadly. It is also important to know that:

- UVA rays can cause long-term skin damage such as wrinkles and age spots.
- UVB rays are the main cause of sunburns.

The good news is that skin cancer is highly preventable.

What is the best way to prevent skin cancer?

Be smart about sun exposure. Follow these easy guidelines:

- **Stay in the shade:** Avoid being out in direct sunlight from around 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are strongest. Try to do your favorite outside activities earlier or later in the day.
- **Don't burn:** Just one sunburn increases your chance of developing melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer
- **Cover up with clothing:** Wear a broad-brimmed hat and wraparound sunglasses. Also, long pants and long-sleeve shirts with UV protection in the fabric can provide sun protection while still keeping you cool.
- **Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher each day:** Make sure to wear enough of it. For maximum protection, apply one ounce (two tablespoons) 30 minutes before you go outside, and reapply every few hours.
- **Avoid tanning beds:** Using a tanning bed, even infrequently, increases your chances of developing skin cancer significantly.

Why are tanning beds dangerous?

Using a tanning bed for 20 minutes is like spending one to three hours a day at the beach with no sun protection at all, cites the Melanoma Foundation. Some tanning beds can give off as much as 12 times the sun's radiation.

People who use tanning beds before age 35 increase their melanoma risk by 75 percent, reported the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Is it healthy to acquire a base tan before going on vacation?

It's a common myth that tanning offers good skin protection against sunburn. In reality, a tan from a sunbed offers only limited protection against sunburn from solar UV. The World Health Organization estimates that a sunbed tan offers the same protective effect as using a sunscreen with an SPF of only 2 or 3.

What are the physiological effects of tanning?

Tanning, like smoking and heavy drinking, can be addictive. Here's a side-by-side comparison of health risks associated with cigarettes and indoor tanning:

Cigarettes/Tobacco

- Classified by the FDA as a Level 1 carcinogen
- Proven to cause lung cancer
- Can cause cancers of the mouth and throat, with treatments often leaving people scarred or disfigured
- Contribute to rising lung cancer death rates among women

Tanning beds/UVR

- Classified by the FDA as a Level 1 carcinogen
- Proven to cause skin cancer
- Can cause cancers of the eye or carcinoma, with treatments often leaving people scarred or vision impaired
- Contribute to rising melanoma death rates among women