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Health & Wellness

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News from the Blues

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Summer Tip



Putting Tanning Beds to Rest

Tanning beds have been a topic of discussion and in the news lately. Although many people are aware of the dangers of tanning, each day there are still more than a million Americans basking in a tanning salon.

Nearly 70 percent are Caucasian girls and women, mostly 16 to 29-years-old. In fact, almost 10 percent of the nearly 28 million people a year who tan indoors are teens. However, The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently called for all U.S. tanning salons to bar minors.

Dermatologists warn that UV radiation from the sun, tanning beds, or sun-lamps is a known carcinogen. Excessive indoor tanning can lead to premature skin aging, a weakened immune system, eye damage (including cataracts and ocular melanoma, a type of eye cancer), and skin burns.

Then there's the increased risk for skin cancer. A 2010 study in *Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention* states that no indoor tanning device can be considered safe. Long-term exposure to artificial sources of ultraviolet rays like tanning beds (or to the sun's natural rays) increases both men and women's risk of developing skin cancer. In addition, exposure to tanning salon rays increases damage caused by sunlight because ultraviolet light actually thins the skin, making it less able to heal.

The study of 1,167 participants found that using a tanning salon increased the risk for melanoma by 74 percent. And the risk was two-and-a-half to three times greater for heavy users who had tanned indoors for either more than 50 hours, more than 100 sessions, or more than 10 years.

If you feel you must look tanned, consider using a sunless tanning spray or lotion containing dihydroxyacetone (DHA). That will darken your skin color for several days. If you use it, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says you should also apply sunscreen at least 30 minutes before you go outdoors.

Finally, don't swallow tanning pills, which are unsafe and not FDA-approved. Some of these pills contain the color additive canthaxanthin. Taken in large amounts, canthaxanthin can turn skin colors ranging from orange to brown. It can also cause liver damage, hives, and an eye disorder in which yellow deposits form in the retinas.

Visit the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Texas website to learn more about harmful UV rays and preventing skin cancer. *Sources: National Cancer Institute, Skin Cancer Foundation, Cancer Epidemiology, Biomarkers & Prevention, June*

