

The Dangers of Tanning

Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

Understanding the dangers of tanning is very important to everyone's health. A tan from ultraviolet (UV) radiation is harmful regardless of whether it is received from the sun or tanning lamps. Anyone who has a tan from UV rays has experienced skin cell damage; there is no such thing as a healthy tan. In fact, tanning from indoor tanning salons, which has become an alarming epidemic among young people, has produced more than 400,000 new skin cancer cases in the U.S. That number is higher than the number of new lung cancer cases due to smoking. Over time, the cumulative damage to your skin from tanning will lead not only to premature aging of the skin, but possibly skin cancer. ⁽¹⁾

What is ultraviolet (UV) radiation?

It is important to learn why you need to protect yourself against UV radiation exposure. ⁽¹⁾

- UV radiation comes from the electromagnetic (light) spectrum of the sun that reaches earth.
- UV radiation has wavelengths shorter than the light you see making it invisible to the naked eye.
- Two forms of UV rays with the longest wavelengths that penetrate the atmosphere are: UVA (400-320 nanometers) and UVB (320-290 nanometers).

What are some of the dangers of tanning?

No matter how you get your tan whether it's from a day at the beach, from a tanning salon, or just by incidental exposure, it is never healthy for you. ⁽¹⁾

- UV radiation from the sun or tanning lamps results in a burn or tan which equates to skin cell damage.
- The damage done by UV radiation may lead to:
 - premature aging
 - wrinkles
 - lax skin
 - brown spots
 - skin cancer
- UV rays compromise your immune system, lessening your ability to fight illnesses.
- Using a tanning bed before the age of 35 increases your risk for melanoma by 75 percent.

How can I change my child's perception that having a tan equates to looking good?

Unfortunately, many younger people do not value their health in the same manner as someone older. They are looking at the here and now and believe that they look better with a tan. Instead, you need to focus their attention on the benefits of not tanning and try to promote healthier ways to look and feel good, such as: ⁽¹⁾

- Provide information that shows the importance of the health of their skin and the short- and long-term damaging effects of UV exposure.
- Talk about healthier alternatives to tanning, such as being active and eating healthy.
- If they insist on wanting the look of a tan, suggest a sunless tanning product.
- Recognize that for some individuals tanning is an addiction and may need to be treated psychologically.

What can I do to help prevent skin cancer?

There are many things you can do to help in the prevention of skin cancer, some of which are: ⁽¹⁾

- **Don't burn** – use a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.
 - For extended outdoor activity use a water-resistant sunscreen.
 - Re-apply every two hours or immediately after swimming or excessive sweating.
- **Seek the shade** – and stay out of the sun as much as possible from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM
- **Cover up** – wear protective clothing, a broad-brimmed hat, and ultraviolet (UV) blocking sunglasses.
- **Tanning booths** – avoid these completely.
- **Newborns** – keep newborns out of the sun and always use sunscreen on babies and children.
- **Self-exam** – always examine your skin head-to-toe once a month.
- **Yearly exam** – have a professional skin exam once a year.

What resources are available for more information on the dangers of tanning?

It is important that everyone work together to change the perception that tanned skin is beautiful. Your medical plan has wellness coaches and registered nurses who can help you with any questions you may have through Railroad HealthLink, anytime, 24/7 at 1-866-735-5685.

⁽¹⁾ www.skincancer.org

This is informational only, not a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.
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