

Tanning Beds

Why are tanning beds not safe?

Some people think that tanning beds and sunlamps can tan their skin safely without the harmful side effects of sunlight. This is not true. Indoor tanning damages your skin just as sunlight does. And, like sunlight, it increases your risk of skin cancer, including melanoma, the most serious and often fatal form of skin cancer.

How are they harmful?

The sun, tanning beds, and sunlamps emit 2 kinds of ultraviolet light: UVA and UVB. UVB is more likely to cause sunburn but UVA goes more deeply into the skin. Both types of UV rays cause wrinkled skin and damage to the eye. And both increase your risk of skin cancer.

Exposure to UV rays causes:

- An increased risk for skin cancer
- Red, itchy, dry skin
- Sagging, wrinkled, leathery-looking skin
- Burning of the skin
- Damage to the eyes, such as cataracts
- Damage to the immune system, which can make it harder for your body to fight disease, including skin cancer.

If you want to look tan, consider the much safer choice of self-tanning creams and gels.

What precautions can I take if I choose to use tanning beds?

If, despite the risks, you choose to use tanning beds or sun lamps, take the following precautions:

- Talk to your healthcare provider about your personal risk factors for skin cancer.
- Find out from the salon operator the recommended exposure for your skin type.
- Read the warning labels on the equipment and be sure to follow the directions. If you cannot find the label, tell the operator that you would like to see this information.
- Protect your eyes with eyewear that blocks UV rays.
- Make sure that there is a barrier between you and the tanning lamp, such as a clear sheet of acrylic.
- Start slowly with short exposure times of usually no more than 5 minutes. If you get the maximum exposure the first time, you will probably get burned.

Often you may not know that you are burned until several hours after the session.

- Do not tan more often than every other day. After you have a tan, do no more than 2 tanning sessions a week.

For more information about tanning beds and skin cancer, contact the American Academy of Dermatology. You can visit their Web site at <http://www.aad.org> or call 888-462-3376.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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