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# Health Tips

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with

Dr. D



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## Health Tip: Indoor Tanning, Healthy or Harmful?

Indoor tanning is a multi-billion dollar-a-year industry in the United States, with up to 28 million Americans tanning indoors each year. Furthermore, tanning bed use in the US is increasing, especially among adolescents. This is in spite of



serious health concerns associated with exposure to the ultraviolet radiation (UV) from tanning salons. In 1994, a Swedish study found that women 18-30 years old who visited tanning parlors 10 or more times a year had seven times greater incidence of melanoma than women who did not use tanning salons. In another study, people exposed to just 10 full-body tanning salon sessions had a significant increase in skin repair proteins typically associated with sun damage, indicating that ultraviolet (UV) radiation from indoor tanning is as dangerous as UV from the sun. And, in 2002, a study from Dartmouth

Medical School found that tanning device users had 2.5 times the risk of squamous cell carcinoma and 1.5 times the risk of basal cell carcinoma.

The tanning industry justifies indoor tanning with two arguments. First, since melanoma is mainly caused by sunburn, "controlled" tanning helps prevent melanoma by building up the protective pigment melanin. Second, since UV

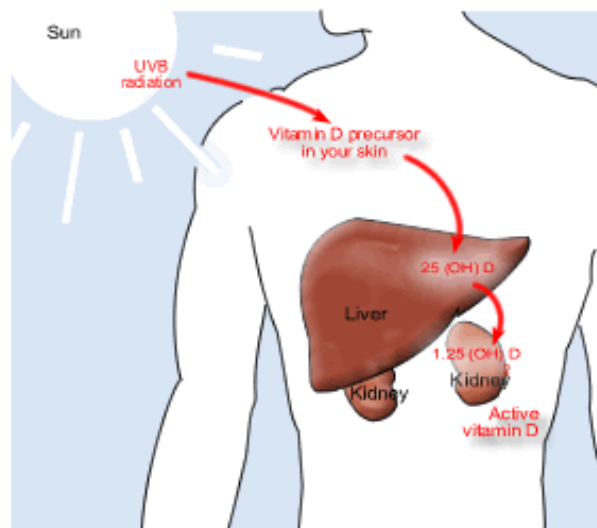
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exposure allows the skin to produce vitamin D, tanning helps prevent breast, prostate and colon cancer, as well as other diseases. Sunlight and artificial sunlight such as that used in tanning salons emits three different types of radiation in the ultraviolet range-UVA, UVB and UVC. All of these are capable of producing damage to the skin in the process of creating a tan. Since past studies had shown UVB to be the most dangerous in regard to its potential for causing skin cancer, the tanning industry responded by lowering levels of UVB emitted by their equipment. Even those lower levels of UVB still can cause skin damage and cancer, however, and UVA radiation may pose more of a risk than was previously thought.

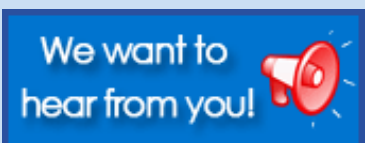
The Vitamin D argument is more difficult to refute. It is becoming more and more apparent that Vitamin D deficiency is a significant risk to our health with



links to the development of heart disease, several types of cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis and periodontal disease. Vitamin D is naturally present in very few foods, with the flesh of fish (such as salmon, tuna, and mackerel) and fish liver oils being some of the best sources. Much of the Vitamin D that we consume is in "fortified" foods such as milk and orange juice or in vitamin supplements. Sunlight exposure is perhaps the most important way that

we get adequate amounts of Vitamin D. Ultraviolet rays from sunlight (or tanning lights) striking the skin triggers Vitamin D production in the body. Complete avoidance of the sun in someone with a marginal diet could easily result in Vitamin D deficiency and its associated health consequences. Furthermore, those living in northern latitudes, such as New England, are especially at risk since the UV rays responsible for producing Vitamin D are markedly reduced in the winter. The American Academy of Dermatology is adamant in its belief that it is better to get vitamin D from dietary sources than from sun exposure. The Academy's "[Don't Seek the Sun](#)" campaign provides 9 reasons to get Vitamin D from the diet instead of from sun exposure. Despite the importance of the sun to vitamin D synthesis, it is prudent to limit exposure of skin to sunlight or to indoor tanning lights. Around 10 minutes of natural sunlight exposure to most of the body is all that is required on a daily basis to produce a day's supply of Vitamin D. How this correlates with time in a tanning booth is uncertain since tanning lights generally deliver higher levels of UV radiation per minute of exposure.

Keep in mind that UV rays are UV rays whether they come from the sun or a





tanning bed. Perhaps it gets back to what occurs "naturally", is beneficial and that which is excessive or artificial may be harmful. The almost unavoidable exposure to natural sunlight activates the normal (and essential) process of Vitamin D production in the body. Sun bathing or use of tanning booths for aesthetic purposes may be a time bomb for the development of premature skin aging and cancer later down the road. Recall that for years, the tobacco lobby used similar terms that the indoor tanning lobby is using now, such as "junk science" and "myths," to counter claims that cigarette smoking could cause lung cancer. Granted, epidemiologic evidence is less compelling than controlled clinical trials at proving the risks of external influences on our health. But with the highly significant evidence now available linking indoor tanning to the development of skin cancer and other adverse effects on health, is it worth the risk that you may be being misled for the sake of profit?

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