

Sunscreens and Tanning

Many people like to spend time in the sun, but it can also cause harm. The sun can cause skin cancer, sunburn, wrinkles, and skin aging. Too much sun can even harm the body's immune system. You don't need to get a sunburn to have skin damage. Skin damage builds up over your lifetime.

What causes sunburn?

The sun's UV (ultraviolet) rays cause sunburn. The sun gives out two kinds of UV rays: UVA and UVB. You need to protect your skin from both kinds. Look for sunscreens and sunglasses that protect from both UVA and UVB rays.

A sunburn takes 6 to 48 hours to develop. You may not know your skin is burned until it is too late.

What does SPF mean?

SPF stands for "sun protection factor." Sunscreen labels have an SPF number. The higher the number, the better the protection.

What can I do to protect myself?

- Don't stay in the sun for a long time, especially in the middle of the day. The sun's rays are strongest from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in spring and summer.
- Use sunscreen with SPF 15 or more.

- Apply more sunscreen every two hours and after swimming, sweating, or towel drying.
- Use sunscreen even on a cloudy day. Glare from water and snow can expose you to UV.
- Wear clothing that covers your body and a hat with a wide brim to protect your head and face.
- Wear sunglasses that protect from UV. Not all tinted and dark glasses offer UV protection. Check the label before you buy them.

Sunlamps and Tanning Beds

Sunlamps and tanning beds give off UV rays just like the sun. Tanning beds can be as dangerous as tanning outdoors. They may be more dangerous than the sun because they can be used at any time. They can also be more dangerous because people can expose their entire bodies at each session, which would be difficult to do outdoors.

FDA and the National Cancer Institute recommend avoiding tanning beds.

- All tanning beds put you at higher risk of skin cancer.
- NCI reports that women who use tanning beds more than once a month are 55 percent more likely to develop melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer.



Sunscreens and Tanning



FDA has standards for sunlamp products. All sunlamp products must have:

- a warning label
- an accurate timer
- an emergency stop control
- an exposure schedule
- protective goggles

Some people do things that make tanning beds even more dangerous, like:

- Not wearing goggles or wearing goggles that are loose or cracked.
- Staying in the bed for the maximum time that is listed on the label.
- Staying in the bed longer than recommended for your skin type. Check the label for exposure times.
- Using medicines or cosmetics that make you more sensitive to UV rays. Check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

What are “sunless” tanning products?

- Sunless tanning products are cosmetics that make the skin look tanned.
- Most of these products do not have sunscreen, so you still need to use sunscreen.
- If you go to a spray-on sunless tanning booth, ask for protection to keep from breathing in the spray. Keep it out of your mouth, eyes, and lips.
- FDA has not approved any tanning pills. These pills can have bad side effects like include nausea, cramping, diarrhea, severe itching, and welts. Tanning pills also may cause yellow patches inside your eyes and affect your eyesight.
- Some lotions and pills claim to make you tan faster. There is no proof that these work. “Tanning accelerators” are not approved by the FDA.

FDA Office of Women’s Health <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

To Learn More:

FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov>