

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

Indoor Tanning

Ads for tanning salons, sun lamps and tanning beds promise a bronzed body year-round, but experts agree that ultraviolet (UV) radiation from these devices damages the skin and poses serious health risks. Sunburns and tans are signs of skin damage. Deliberate tanning, either indoors or out, increases your risk of melanoma and nonmelanoma skin cancer.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), enforce laws dealing with tanning devices. The FTC investigates false, misleading, and deceptive advertising claims about the devices; the FDA enforces regulations that deal with the labels on the devices.

Myths and Reality

Here are some claims commonly made about indoor tanning – and the facts.

“Get a beautiful tan indoors without increasing your risk of skin cancer.”

The lamps used in tanning booths and beds emit two forms of ultraviolet (UV) radiation – UVA and UVB. UVB rays penetrate the top layers of your skin and are most responsible for burns. UVA rays penetrate to the deeper layers of skin and often are associated with allergic reactions, like a rash. Both UVA and UVB rays damage the skin and can lead to skin cancer. What's more, scientists say, tanning can cause premature aging, immune suppression, and serious eye damage.

“Indoor tanning is safer than the sun because the environment is controlled.”

Sun lamps may be more dangerous than the sun because they can be used at the same high intensity every day of the year. Radiation from the sun varies in intensity with the time of day, the season, and cloud cover. Studies show that many people who tan indoors get burns.

“Indoor tanning is approved by the government.”

No U.S. government agency recommends the use of indoor tanning equipment. And the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), part of the World Health Organization, also has concluded that tanning devices that emit UV radiation are more dangerous than previously thought. IARC moved these devices into the highest cancer risk category.

“Indoor tanning is a safe way to increase vitamin D levels.”

Vitamin D has many roles in human health. For example, it is essential for promoting good bone health. While UVB radiation helps your body produce vitamin D, you don't need a tan to get that benefit. In fact, 10 to 15 minutes of unprotected natural sun exposure on your face and hands 2 to 3 times a week during the summer gives you a healthy dose of vitamin D. You also can get vitamin D from food: good sources include low-fat milk, salmon, tuna, and fortified orange juice.

For More Information

To learn more about the risks of tanning, visit:

- The Food and Drug Administration
www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm186687.htm
- The American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org
- The American Academy of Dermatology
www.aad.org

The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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