

April Shetrone

December 7, 2010

Op-ed

### Indoor Tanning is Not Safe Tanning

Twenty-eight million Americans visit tanning salons every year. While the indoor-tanning industry is raking in millions of dollars, Americans, particularly young woman, are damaging their skin, wasting their money, and doubling their risk of skin cancer. The worst part is, consumers are led to believe that indoor-tanning is not only safe but also beneficial.

ABC News and *Cosmopolitan* recently teamed up to uncover the misleading information provided by tanning salons. Investigators posing as potential customers inquired about indoor booths. The answers were shocking.

When asked about the correlation between indoor tanning and skin cancer, one tanning salon responded, “The dermatology association is in bed with big companies to promote their product: sunscreen.”

David J. Leffell, professor of dermatology and surgery at the Yale School of Medicine, disagrees, explaining, “There’s no longer any debate about UV radiation causing cancer. Any attempt to obscure this is dishonest, ignorant, or both. The indoor-tanning industry is misstating facts for its own gain.”

An August 2009 report from the International Agency for Research on Cancer shows that people who tan indoors before the age of 30 increase their risk of skin cancer by 75 percent. It is

no wonder melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, is the second most common cancer for women in their 20s and the third most common cancer for women in their 30s.

Due to public concerns about vitamin D deficiencies, salons are promoting indoor tanning as an excellent source of the nutrient. While ultraviolet rays do prompt the body to create the vitamin, the amount of UV rays emitted in the booths vastly exceeds the recommended exposure necessary to reach sufficient vitamin D levels. Doctors suggest people spend 10 minutes outdoors three times a week. However, twenty minutes in an indoor booth equals more than three hours of natural sunlight. Vitamin D levels can be achieved through a healthy diet or an over-the-counter supplement.

UV exposure has also been linked to mood-enhancing hormones such as endorphins and serotonin. Salons draw in customers by stressing the psychological benefits of these hormones. The same blissful effect, however, can be achieved through cheaper, healthier habits such as exercising and socializing.

Many women visit tanning salons because they feel sexier when they are bronze. Most women don't realize that tanning now will make their skin less attractive in the future thanks to wrinkles and age-spots. Self-tanning products are a safe, inexpensive alternative. Formulas are available for all skin types. Increased education and reformed advertising can steer woman towards these safe substitutes.

Stricter legislation is necessary to prevent salons from exploiting young women's desire to look and feel beautiful. Just as tobacco and alcohol companies are required to reveal the dangers of their products, tanning salons need to disclose the harmful effects of indoor booths.

Legislation can also protect those who choose to tan. The Tanning-Bed-Cancer Control Act was introduced to Congress this year. The bill will expand the FDA's regulation of tanning beds by limiting the strength of the UV rays and reducing exposure time. If passed, this act will decrease the number of skin cancer cases linked to indoor tanning, which has increased rapidly since the 1980s.

We need to educate young women about the dangers of tanning and the alternatives that are available. One of the best ways to do this is to be a positive role model. Show the young women in your life that you can feel and look great without destroying your skin. We already talk to our daughters about the risks associated with tobacco, alcohol, and unprotected sex. Now, let's talk to them about the consequences of indoor tanning and motivate them to create a change.