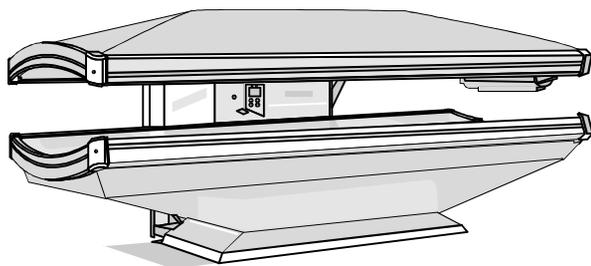


Facts
for Consumers



Indoor Tanning



Federal Trade Commission
Bureau of Consumer Protection
Office of Consumer & Business Education
(202) 326-3650

August 1997

“Tan indoors with absolutely no harmful side effects”

“No burning, no drying, and no sun damage”

“Unlike the sun, indoor tanning will not cause skin cancer or skin aging”

Beware of claims like these. Ads that claim indoor tanning devices are a safe alternative to outdoor tanning may be false.

Tanning indoors damages your skin. That’s because indoor tanning devices emit ultraviolet rays. Tanning occurs when the skin produces additional pigment (coloring) to protect itself against burn from ultraviolet rays. Overexposure to these rays can cause eye injury, premature wrinkling of the skin, and light-induced skin rashes, and can increase your chances of developing skin cancer.

Tanning Devices

The most popular device used in tanning salons is a clamshell-like tanning bed. The customer lies down on a Plexiglas surface as lights from above and below reach the body.

Many older tanning devices used light sources that emitted shortwave ultraviolet rays (UVB) that actually caused burning. Aware of the harmful effects of UVB radiation, salon owners began using tanning beds that emit mostly longwave (UVA) light

sources. Some salons claim this is safe. While UVA rays are less likely to cause burning than UVB rays, they are suspected to have links to malignant melanoma and immune system damage.

Advertising Claims

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

“You can achieve a deep year-round tan with gentle, comfortable, and safe UVA light.”

Ultraviolet light is divided into two wavelength bands. Shortwave ultraviolet rays called UVB can burn the outer layer of skin. Longwave ultraviolet rays called UVA penetrate more deeply and can weaken the skin’s inner connective tissue.

Long-term exposure to the sun and to artificial sources of ultraviolet light contributes to the risk of developing skin cancer. Two types of skin cancer, basal cell and squamous cell, are treatable if detected early. Melanoma, another type of skin cancer, can be fatal.

“No harsh glare, so no goggles or eye shades are necessary.”

Studies show that too much exposure to ultraviolet rays, including UVA rays, can damage the retina. Overexposure can burn the cornea, and repeated exposure over many years can change the structure of the lens so that it begins to cloud, forming a cataract. Left untreated, cataracts can cause blindness.

The Food and Drug Administration requires tanning salons to direct all customers to wear protective eye goggles. Closing your eyes, wearing ordinary sunglasses, and using cotton wads do not protect the cornea from the intensity of UV radiation in tanning devices.

Long-term exposure to natural sunlight also can result in eye damage, but in the sun, people generally are more aware that their eyelids are burning. Under indoor UV lights, exposed skin remains cool to the touch. In addition, the intensity of lights used in tanning devices is much greater — and potentially more damaging to the eyes — than the intensity of UV rays in natural sunlight.

“Tan year round without the harmful side effects often associated with natural sunlight.”

Exposure to tanning salon rays increases the damage caused by sunlight. This occurs because ultraviolet light actually thins the skin, making it less able to heal.

Unprotected exposure to ultraviolet rays also results in premature skin aging. A tan is damaged skin that is more likely to wrinkle and sag than skin that hasn't been tanned. Over time, you may notice certain undesirable changes in the way your skin looks and heals. According to some skin specialists, skin that has a dry, wrinkled, leathery appearance early in middle age is a result of UV exposure that occurred in youth.

“No danger in exposure or burning.”

Whether you tan indoors or out, studies show the combination of ultraviolet rays and some medicines, birth control pills, cosmetics, and soaps may accelerate skin burns or produce painful adverse skin reactions, such as rashes. In addition, tanning devices may induce common light-sensitive skin ailments like cold sores.

Protecting Yourself

1. Limit your exposure to avoid sunburn. If you tan with a device, ask whether the manufacturer or the salon staff recommend exposure limits for your skin type. Set a timer on the tanning device that automatically shuts off the lights or somehow signals that you've reached your exposure time. Remember that exposure time affects burning and that your age at the time of exposure is important relative to burning. Studies suggest that children and adolescents are harmed more by equivalent amounts of UVB rays than adults. The earlier you start tanning, the earlier skin injury may occur.

2. Use goggles to protect your eyes. Ask whether safety goggles are provided and if their use is mandatory. Make sure the goggles fit snugly. Check to see that the salon sterilizes the goggles after each use to prevent the spread of eye infections.

3. Consider your medical history. If you are undergoing treatment for lupus or diabetes or are susceptible to cold sores, be aware that these conditions can be aggra-

vated through exposure to ultraviolet radiation from tanning devices, sunlamps, or natural sunlight. In addition, your skin may be more sensitive to artificial light or sunlight if you use certain medications — for example, antihistamines, tranquilizers or birth control pills. Your tanning salon may keep a file with information on your medical history, medications, and treatments. Make sure you update it as necessary.

A Word About Sunscreens

Chances are you spend some time in natural sunlight. You still could benefit from using sunscreens with sun protection factor (SPF) numbers of 15 or more. The SPF number gives you some idea of how long you can stay in the sun without burning. For example, if you normally burn in 10 minutes without sunscreen, you should be protected from burn for 150 minutes using SPF 15. Swimming and perspiration reduce the actual SPF value for many sunscreens, so be sure to reapply even if the product is water-resistant.

While all sunscreens provide some level of protection against UVB rays, no product screens out all UVA rays. Some may advertise UVA protection, but there's no system yet for rating UVA protection. Even when you use a sunscreen with a high SPF number, there's no way to know how much UVA protection you're getting.

Regulation

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) share responsibilities in the regulation of sunlamps and tanning devices. The FDA enforces regulations that deal with labels on the devices; the FTC investigates false, misleading, and deceptive advertising claims about the devices. When these agencies determine that device labels don't comply with the regulations or that advertisements are not truthful, they may take corrective action. The FDA also can remove products from the marketplace.

If you have questions or complaints about claims made in ads for tanning devices, contact: Consumer Response Center, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580, 202-326-2222, TDD 202-326-2502.

For More Information

The FTC publishes a number of brochures on consumer issues. To order **Best Sellers**, a complete list of FTC publications, contact the FTC at the address or telephone numbers above. You also can access FTC publications at www.ftc.gov on the Internet.