

Tanning

When skin is exposed to ultraviolet (UV) radiation it produces melanin, this is the dark pigment that gives colour to the skin - a tan. There is no such thing as a healthy tan, because to get a tan you need to expose your skin to harmful levels of UV radiation.

Every time skin is exposed to UV radiation the lifetime dose of UV radiation is added to. Over time this exposure shows as accumulated damage including blotching, wrinkles and freckles. Tanning is a further sign of skin damage due to UV radiation. Over exposure to UV radiation is known to increase the risk of developing skin cancers.

Protecting skin

- Do not over expose your skin to the sun. Be especially careful during peak UV period from 11am to 3pm.
- Wear sun protective clothing and a hat.
- Correctly apply a broad-spectrum, SPF 15 or more sunscreen. Do not rely on sunscreen alone as protection; no sunscreen gives 100% protection.
- Sunbeds and solarium use exposes skin to high levels of UV radiation.

Using sunscreens

- Apply generously over exposed areas of skin before applying any moisturisers or make-up and at least 20 minutes before going into the sun.
- Reapply every 2 hours or more frequently if the sunscreen is rubbed, perspired or wiped off.
- Some moisturisers include a sunscreen; ensure the SPF is at least 15 and preferably broad-spectrum.
- Protect your lips with high SPF lip balms and lipsticks.

Sunbeds

Sunbeds use both UVA and UVB radiation. UVA penetrates the top layer of the skin and damages the lower layers causing the skin to age prematurely and recent evidence suggests it is a risk factor for skin cancer.

'Fast tanning sunbeds' use high levels of UVB radiation up to ten times greater than the mid-day summer sun.

Radiation from sunbed use adds to radiation damage from the sun. It does not make it easier or safer to tan in the sun. If you do not tan in the sun you will not tan on a sunbed.

Over exposure to UV radiation contributes to the development of skin cancers, premature ageing, cataracts and other eye damage.

Fake tans

Fake tanning products contain dyes that temporarily stain the skin brown. The stain binds to the skin and comes off when the dead skin cells flake off.

Generally fake tans offer very little UV radiation protection. Those that contain a SPF provide only short term protection for two to four hours from the time of application and not for the time the skin remains stained.

Fake tans encourage the perception that a tan is attractive and healthy, skin cancer prevention programmes encourage appreciating your natural skin colour and avoiding tanning.