



Baked Not Beautiful: Tans Are Not Healthy

Enjoying the sun has always been popular, and getting that “healthy” tanned glow is something many people strive for, so much so that tanning salons are found everywhere. But whether you’re “catching rays” outside or in a tanning bed, there are some important things to know.

WHAT IS A TAN?

Skin contains melanin; it is what gives your skin its colour. Different people have different levels of melanin in their skin. When your skin is damaged by the ultraviolet (UV) radiation produced by the sun and tanning beds, it produces more melanin in an attempt to protect it from further, and deeper, damage. So a tan is your skin’s way of showing that it has been damaged by UV radiation.

IS TANNING DANGEROUS?

There is no doubt that when you tan you damage your skin. Exposure to UV radiation leads to wrinkles, but more importantly it increases your risk of getting skin cancer. This is true whether you get a tan outside in the sun or inside in a tanning bed – a tan means skin damage. Additionally, eyes exposed to enough UV radiation will cause cataracts, even a little exposure at a time adds up over a lifetime.

KEEP YOUR SKIN SAFE

There is never a good argument for using a tanning bed, but there are a lot of benefits of getting outdoors and enjoying the sun, just do it safely!

- Choose a sunscreen that protects against UVA (long wave ultraviolet) and UVB (short wave ultraviolet) and has a “sun protection factor” (SPF) of at least 15
- Don’t forget the sunglasses! Make sure the lenses provide UVA and UVB protection.
- Cover up. A wide brimmed hat can offer sun protection and clothing does as well.
- Find the shade. Lounging in the shade is the best way to enjoy a sunny day and comes with the least amount of risk too!

And don’t forget, even on cloudy days UV exposure can be high. So check your local UV report and always be sun smart!

RESOURCES

To learn more, visit these sites:

Health Canada’s Sun Safety <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/sun-safety.html>

American Academy of Dermatology, spot skin cancer <https://www.aad.org/public/spot-skin-cancer>

Canadian Cancer Society Sun and UV <http://www.cancer.ca/en/prevention-and-screening/live-well/sun-and-uv/>

Canadian Cancer Society Indoor Tanning <http://www.cancer.ca/en/prevention-and-screening/live-well/sun-and-uv/indoor-tanning/>