



Live Well, Work Well

The amount of vitamin D that a person needs can be acquired from far less sunlight than it takes to get a suntan.

TANNING BEDS

Tanning bed safety has long been debated with experts disagreeing about the consequences of artificial tanning. However, a study shows that tanning beds pose a greater risk than previously believed and are indeed linked to causing skin cancer.

Carcinogenic to Humans

The study was conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a World Health Organization agency that has developed the most widely used system for classifying carcinogens (cancer-causing agents).

The IARC conducted a comprehensive review of current research (over 60 studies), and came to the conclusion that tanning beds should be elevated to the highest cancer risk category: "carcinogenic to humans."

This is a serious measure, but to keep it in perspective, a few other items on that list include alcoholic beverages, salted fish, furniture and cabinet making, and occupational painting. Thus, for some items on that list, the classification serves as merely a strong recommendation to consume certain substances or engage in certain activities in moderation.

UVA vs. UVB Rays

Sunlight emits both UVA and UVB radiation, and it was once thought that UVA rays were safe and UVB rays were harmful. Since tanning beds primarily use UVA rays, people believed that tanning beds were safer than tanning outside. However, now it is known that both can cause cancer, making tanning beds just as risky (if not more so) than natural sunlight.

Who's at Risk?

Tanning beyond one's normal skin complexion damages the DNA in skin cells, which can cause cancer. This damage is most severe for fair-skinned individuals. The American Cancer Society recommends that all people avoid tanning beds, but they name the following as higher-risk individuals that should never use tanning beds:

- People under age 18
- People with very fair skin
- People who burn easily
- People who have had skin cancer or have a family history of the disease
- People using medication that could make their skin more sensitive to UV rays
- People who already have extreme sun damage

However, though some people are more at-risk than others, remember that tanning bed use for anyone raises the risk of melanoma (the most deadly type of skin cancer) by 75 percent when use starts before age 30. Also keep in mind other negative effects of extended UV exposure, including premature aging of the skin, wrinkles and various forms of eye damage.