

Skin Cancer at the Tanning Salon

Summer is still a few weeks away, but you're way ahead of the calendar. You've been visiting the tanning salon, and you've got a golden brown tan that would make any Hollywood starlet proud. But maybe you picked up something at the sun bed that you hadn't planned.

Skin cancer at the tanning salon is a reality that's affecting sun bed worshippers at an alarming rate. Whether you tan at the coast or at the "electric beach", your risk of developing skin cancer is the same. A person who spends as little as 30 minutes exposed to ultraviolet rays, natural or otherwise, can develop sunburn. This is true whether you're in Cancun, Mexico or London, England. Radiation from the sun, or from a sun bed, can have serious long-term effects on your life.

Exposure to ultraviolet rays is the major cause of skin cancer. In England alone, this common disease affects about 50,000 people each year. The most dangerous form of skin cancer, known as malignant melanoma, kills more than 2% of those who develop the disease. In America, skin cancer accounts for about half of all new cancer cases. It's predicted that half of all Australians will develop the disease at some point in their life.

Sadly, children are among the most vulnerable groups and are at high risk. All children must be protected from the sun, and those under six months old should be kept out of the sun completely. Infant skin is unable to produce the required amount of melanin, which is natural protection from UV light. Dermatologists and other skin experts believe there may be a link between sunburn experienced during childhood, and malignant melanoma developed later on in life.

Every sunburn, and every tanning bed session, causes damage to DNA and individual skin cells. Some of these cells will die, and others will repair themselves. Those cells unable to repair themselves will eventually become the defective cells posing problems or developing cancer.

The ultraviolet rays within the tanning salon light bulbs and natural sunlight have been known to lower the immune system in the human body, making it difficult for the body to destroy cells that have become defective. These defective cells can later grow to produce a cancerous tumor.

Skin cancer known as melanoma usually appears first as a formation of pigmented malignant moles, or tumors that are dark in color. These can appear very suddenly and without warning, or they can develop around or out of existing moles. These moles can appear anywhere on the body, but most often around the upper back and the legs.

You should be very familiar with your body, and watch for the following changes:

- * Change in the size or color of moles and birthmarks
- * Itchy or bleeding moles or birthmarks
- * Dark or irregular spots and growths
- * Pigment spread on the skin
- * Tenderness, itchiness or pain on moles or in the surrounding area

It is essential that you seek the advice of your doctor as soon as you notice any changes occurring in the appearance and number of moles on your body. He or she will likely be able to reassure you that everything is ok, but these can be early signs of malignancy.

Tanning lamps and sun beds are not safer than natural sunlight. The bulbs used for tanning produce ultraviolet rays that can be even more dangerous than the sun. Experts have estimated that a mere twenty minutes under a sunlamp exposes the skin to a UV blast equivalent to four hours in the sun.

The natural light of the sun contains UVA and UVB, some of which are filtered out by the ozone layer. Light produced from sun beds contains mostly UVA rays, which penetrate deeper into the skin. They do not produce as much UVB as the sun. Therefore, those who tan in a sun bed do so with a false sense of security. They expose themselves to dangerous rays without any protection from a sunscreen, and put themselves at great risk of developing skin cancer.

If you are a sun worshipper, whether on the beach or in the tanning salon, you need to protect yourself. Even if your tan comes from a light bulb, you're still at risk of developing skin cancer later in life. That's a chance that's just not worth taking, so cover up and protect your skin!