

the truth about indoor TANNING

Are tanning beds harmful even if I use them only once in a while? ... and more of your questions answered here.

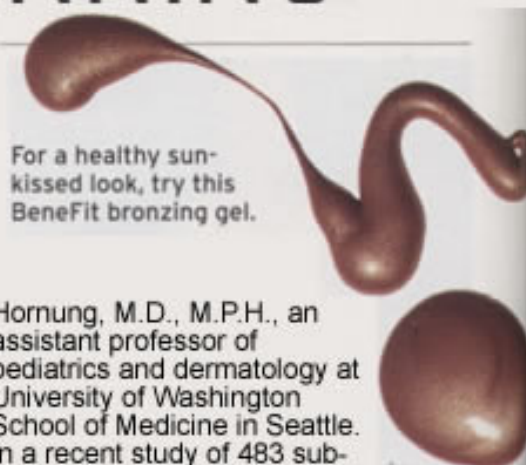
Q Can tanning beds damage my skin even if I use them only once a week? I hate being so pale during the winter.

A Stay away from tanning beds at all costs, says David Goldberg, M.D., director of Skin Laser & Surgery Specialists of New York & New Jersey and vice president of the Skin Cancer Foundation, a nonprofit organization based in New York City. The bulbs in tanning beds emit primarily ultraviolet-A (UVA) rays, which typically don't cause the burning triggered by UVB rays (something tanning salons often will tout as a "benefit"), but these rays have been linked to skin cancer and wrinkles. "If you go to a suntan salon only once in your life, it's not going to harm you," Goldberg says. "But it's clear that more exposure is worse. No one has a crystal ball for the damage threshold. But the lighter your skin is to begin with, the more likely you are to have problems." The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has set recommended limits for the maximum length of time you should spend in tanning salons (it's based on skin type), but most people who visit them ignore these limits, says Robin L.

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Get a healthy glow: Many salons now offer UV-free airbrush tanning, which sprays a natural-looking self-tanner over skin.



For a healthy sun-kissed look, try this Benefit bronzing gel.

Hornung, M.D., M.P.H., an assistant professor of pediatrics and dermatology at University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. In a recent study of 483 subjects at 50 tanning centers in North Carolina, Hornung found that 95 percent of those studied stayed in tanning beds longer than the FDA exposure schedule recommends, and more than one-third set the timers to the longest exposure time on their first day of tanning. Hornung adds that the consensus among dermatologists today is that any tanning-bed exposure is too much. What's more, she says, the rays - both UVA and UVB - emitted from the tanning booths at the tanning centers studied in North Carolina were stronger than she expected: "There are surpris-

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ingly high doses coming from these beds - far more than a typical summer's noonday sun." (For more information on the FDA's advice on tanning beds, go to www.fda.gov.)

A common reason that people "fake bake" is to get some color. If you don't like your pale skin, Goldberg says, use a self-tanner. Editor's picks: Neutrogena Instant Bronze Tinted Sunless Tanner for the face (\$10 at drug stores) and Estée Lauder Go Bronze



This self-tanner can give you a safe faux glow.