Sunbeds and skin cancer

Sunbeds aren't a safe alternative to tanning outdoors. Like the sun, sunbeds give out harmful UV rays which damage the DNA in our skin cells and can cause skin cancer. In fact, sunbeds are estimated to cause around 100 deaths from melanoma every year in the UK.

The more you use a sunbed the greater your risk of skin cancer. Using a sunbed once a month or more, can increase your risk of skin cancer by more than half. So when the tan fades, the damage remains.

Sunbeds also cause premature skin ageing, which means that your skin becomes coarse, leathery and wrinkled at a younger age.

Tanning myths

People use sunbeds for all sorts of reasons. Here, we clear up a few of the most common myths.

**Being tanned is not a sign of health**
The simple fact that your skin has changed colour is a sign of damage. Without goggles, UV from sunbeds can also damage your eyes and lead to irritation, conjunctivitis and eye cancer.

**Skin damage from sunbeds is just as big a problem for young people**
You can't always see the damage that UV does straight away as it builds up gradually. But every time you use a sunbed you are damaging your skin, making it look worse in the long run. Using sunbeds before the age of 35 increases your risk of developing melanoma skin cancer by up to 75%. Surgical treatment for skin cancer can result in serious scarring.

**Spending more time on sunbeds, will not make your tan look any better**
We each have our own tanning limits. No matter how much UV you receive there comes a point when your skin won't get any darker. Using sunbeds will make your skin coarse, leathery and wrinkled. Boosting your tan by having two sunbed sessions within 24 hours or after sunbathing is particularly harmful. Get your beauty sleep in your own bed, rather than on a sunbed.

**Sunbed tanning is no safer than sun tanning**
Sunbeds are not a 'safe' alternative to sun tanning. Sunbeds give out UV rays just like the sun. Exposure to UV rays, whether from the sun or a sunbed, damages the DNA in your skin cells which can cause cancer. In fact, the intensity of some types of UV rays from sunbeds can be up to 10-15 times higher than that of the midday sun. Short periods of intense, irregular UV exposure, like you get on a sunbed, are the fastest way to damage your skin.
A tan will not provide much protection from the sun on holiday
A tan offers very limited protection from sunlight or burning. At most, a sunbed tan is the equivalent to a sunscreen with SPF of just 2-4. Not enough to keep you safe in the sun. And if you don’t tan easily in the sun, you won’t tan easily on a sunbed.

You don’t need to burn to get a tan
Burning or going red under a sunbed is a sign that you have seriously harmed your skin. UV can penetrate deep into the skin’s layers and damage the DNA in our skin cells. Cells damaged by UV are at greater risk of mutating and then dividing uncontrollably, which is what happens in cancer.

You don’t need a sunbed to produce vitamin D
Vitamin D is essential for good health. Our bodies make the vitamin when our skin is exposed to UV rays and it is also present in certain foods. You only need short exposures to the sun to produce adequate amounts. So you don’t need a sunbed to get your vitamins!

Who is most at risk?
People with fair skin that tends to burn are at higher risk of problems from sunbed use than those with darker skin. Young people also have delicate skin and are more likely to damage it by using sunbeds.
You should NEVER use a sunbed if you:

• are under 18
• have fair or freckly skin
• burn easily
• have a lot of moles
• have had skin cancer in the past
• have a family history of skin cancer
• are using medication that increases your sensitivity to UV.

Cancer Research UK is concerned about the use of sunbeds in the UK, particularly by young people. It recommends that anyone with fair skin, lots of moles or a family history of skin cancer avoid sunbeds. Cancer Research UK believe under-18s should not be allowed to use sunbeds and support the banning of un-staffed coin-operated salons. They are also working with others to investigate greater regulation of the sunbed industry. For more information on this download Cancer Research UK Policy Statement on Sunbeds.