



Attention, spring breakers: Tanning is unsafe no matter where you catch rays

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Sun worshipers heading south for spring break this month - and those suffering from tan envy who visit the tanning salon - share a potentially harmful goal: to get a tan.

Whichever method is used to get a tan, it doesn't take long to develop a painful sunburn. Just 19 minutes in a tanning bed sent a British teenager to the hospital with first-degree burns over 70 percent of her body, [London's Daily Mail](#) reported February 20.

And sunburn's not the only consequence of too many harmful rays. One million Americans will develop skin cancer this year, says [Dr. Monica Lynn Halem](#), assistant clinical professor at [Columbia University Medical Center](#) Eastside, and one in five will develop skin cancer during their lifetime. Doctors say sun exposure increases the risk of developing skin cancer and premature signs of aging.

"Whether you go to a tanning booth or stay out in the sun without protection, you are still burning your skin," says [Dr. Craig Austin](#), a [Manhattan](#) dermatologist and the creator of AB Skincare. "By the time people who get tan are 35 years old, they look like prunes and may have skin damage, too."

Though it's widely considered to look healthy, a tan is really "a sign of damage to the skin," reports [Dr. Brooke Jackson](#), board certified dermatologist and founder of The [Skin Wellness Center](#) in [Chicago](#).

She notes that tanning booths deliver a concentrated form of exposure to UV rays, which are harmful to the skin. "Just 30 minutes in a tanning booth is the equivalent of half a day at the beach without protection," Jackson says.

Before spending time in the sun, whether it's at the beach or the ski slope, buy a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30, and make sure it is a broad spectrum sunscreen that blocks both [UVA](#) and UVB rays. Reapply the sunscreen every two hours, and keep track of how much time you stay in the sun. And slather on the sunscreen even if it's hazy. "Just because it's cloudy doesn't let you off the hook," Jackson says. "This is when most people get burned, because they think they are safe."

Skin experts also caution against spending time in a tanning bed – even just a few minutes. "Some people think they are safer than being in the sun, but a tanning bed is no safer than sitting out in the sun," Halem says. "A tanning booth can cause wrinkling, a loss of collagen, and skin cancer."

To get a glow, Jackson recommends using a self tanner or spray on tan. Among her favorites: "Jergen's Natural Glow, [Neutrogena](#) Build a Tan, and [Coppertone](#) Gradual Sunless Tan," she says. "They're all around \$10 at a local drugstore."

And if despite your best efforts, you still get burned? Try [Tylenol](#), a cool bath and cool compresses, Jackson says. "And leave a jar of moisturizer in the refrigerator to apply liberally," she says.

And don't be tempted to visit a tanning salon, says Halem. "We are trying to get the beauty industry to promote the idea that being tan is not healthy," she says. "It's not safe to spend any time in a tanning bed."