

I look (Pick One: Better, Slimmer, Healthier, Prettier) When I'm Tan!

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Most of us like to get a little sun, for cosmetic reasons and because it feels as good as it looks. The warmth and light lifts our spirits – but as the Skin Cancer Foundation states – the benefits come with a dangerous tradeoff. Most of the skin damage we associate with aging – wrinkles, sagging, etc. – are caused by UV rays and not our chronological age. Each year more than 1 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed in the U.S. Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer, and accounts for more than 75% of all skin cancer deaths. Despite repeated health warnings based on proven science, Americans do not protect themselves from a known carcinogen.

A tan is not safe. Ever. Do not burn. Some research shows that melanoma risk doubles if you have been sunburned 5 times in your life. Any sun-induced change in color, tan or red, is an injury to the skin. Even a single sunburn increases your risk of developing melanoma. If your skin is dark and you don't burn, you can still be at risk. Melanoma rates are highest in Caucasians, but can be more deadly to African Americans because the disease is often diagnosed later, and a later diagnosis can mean more advanced disease and lower survival rates. Also, know that if you have moles, you are at greater risk.

Here's the biggest risk. Tanning Beds. The American Academy of Dermatology opposes indoor tanning and supports a ban on the production and sale of indoor tanning equipment. Sunlamps used in tanning salons can emit UV doses as much as 15 times that of the sun. People who use tanning beds are more likely to develop squamous cell carcinoma and basal cell carcinoma, and even occasional use almost triples your chances of developing melanoma. Young people are especially sensitive to the UV radiation emitted by tanning booths. Despite its link to both melanoma and carcinomas, indoor tanning is big business. The prevalence of indoor tanning among US teen girls is as high as 40%. At the American Academy of Dermatology's Summer Academy Meeting, Dr. Martin Weinstock, PhD, MD, and professor of dermatology stated "Teens appear to be a primary target of the indoor tanning industry, which resembles the tobacco industry in distorting science with the likely result of confusing the public about the facts". It is illegal for teens to smoke. It should be illegal for them to tan.

Even knowing all these facts, many will continue to tan. Sometimes a picture is worth more than words, so take a look at this picture and see if you think tanning made this back look pretty. This is what it looks like when melanoma is removed – and thankfully this one was removable. One tiny mole, one tiny melanoma, one huge incision. One family changed forever. Cancer is a very scary word. Melanoma is a very scary cancer. This is my daughter Rebecca. She's a wife and mother of two precious little boys. They have a house on a lake and love to boat and spend time on the water. She has a job she loves as Director of the Oak Ridge Liberty Belles. She has always spent too much time in the sun. She is paying too big a price for it now.

Here is how you protect yourself and your family. Wear sunscreen every day in every kind of weather. Even on overcast days, UV rays travel through clouds. Use enough – 2 tablespoons on all exposed areas and apply 30 minutes before going outside. Reapply often if sweating or swimming but remember, no

sunscreen is completely waterproof. Wear hats, sunglasses, and protective clothing as well. Examine yours and your family's skin regularly for changes of any kind.

Cancer warning signs include:

A spot or sore that won't heal and continues to itch, hurt, crust, scab or bleed.

A growth, mole or spot that:

Changes color

Changes texture

Changes size

Is asymmetrical

Is irregular in outline or border

Is bigger than the size of a pencil eraser

Appears suddenly in adulthood

See your Dr. every year for a professional skin cancer exam! If you have children, have their pediatrician examine their skin. This is especially important for those at high risk for sun damage, such as those with fair skin, light eyes and hair, and those with a family history of skin cancer. Be safe. Keep your family and yourself protected. Get the latest skin cancer news and information at www.skincancer.org.

