Sunbeds
Your health under the spotlight
TANNING MYTHS

“SUNBED TANNING IS SAFER THAN SUN TANNING” FALSE

Sunbeds are not a ‘safe’ alternative to sun tanning. Sunbeds give out ultraviolet (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 UV rays from sunbeds can be up to 10-15 times higher than that of the midday sun.

“I TAN SAFELY BY BUILDING MY SUNBED TAN GRADUALLY” FALSE

Unfortunately, using sunscreen or limiting your time on a sunbed will not protect your skin from damage and ageing. In fact, short periods of intense, irregular exposure to UV, as happens on a sunbed, is the fastest way to damage your skin. Using sunbeds will age your skin.

“A TAN WILL PROTECT ME FROM THE SUN ON HOLIDAY” FALSE

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.

“I NEED A SUNBED TO PRODUCE VITAMIN D” FALSE

Vitamin D is essential for good health and is produced by your skin when it is exposed to UV rays as well as being present in certain foods. Just a few minutes sun on our skin can produce adequate amounts, so you don’t need a sunbed to get your vitamins! For most people, if normal levels are built up in the summer, our bodies store enough of the vitamin to last us through the winter. If you are worried about your vitamin D levels talk to your GP about changing your diet, getting out and about more or taking vitamin supplements.
“BEING TANNED IS A SIGN OF HEALTH”
FALSE

The simple fact that your skin has changed colour is a sign that it has been damaged. UV from sunbeds not only harms your skin, but without goggles, it can also damage your eyes and lead to irritation, conjunctivitis and eye cancer.

“I NEED TO BURN TO GET A TAN”
FALSE

Burning or going red under a sunbed is a sign that you have seriously damaged 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 when you get cancer. If you have fair or freckly skin that tends to burn, you are at even greater risk of damaging your skin cells. Make sure you never burn.

“THE MORE TIME I SPEND ON SUNBEDS, THE BETTER MY TAN WILL LOOK”
FALSE

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. Boosting your tan by having two sunbed sessions within 24 hours or after sunbathing is particularly harmful. Using sunbeds causes your skin to lose its smooth, supple texture and become coarse, leathery and wrinkled. You will be doing your skin a favour by getting your beauty sleep in your own bed, rather than in a sunbed.

“I’M YOUNG - SKIN DAMAGE FROM SUNBEDS IS NOT SOMETHING I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT”
FALSE

You can’t always see the damage that UV does straight away. It builds up over time. But every time you use a sunbed you are harming your skin and worsening its appearance in the long run. And this damage is permanent. Surgical treatment for skin cancer can result in serious scarring. Melanoma is the second most common cancer amongst 20-39 year olds and can be fatal. Using sunbeds before the age of 35 increases your risk of developing skin cancer by up to 75%.

The Royal College of GPs support Cancer Research UK in advising against the use of sunbeds for cosmetic purposes.
WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR?

If you notice any new moles, changes in the size, shape or colour of existing moles, or other abnormal skin changes, don’t delay – get them checked out by your doctor.

FOR YOUR SKIN’S SAKE – KNOW THE FACTS

• Excessive exposure to UV is the main cause of skin cancer. Each year, more than 100,000 people are diagnosed with non-melanoma skin cancer in the UK as well as a further 8,000 with malignant melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer.

• Using a sunbed once a month or more can increase your risk of skin cancer by more than half.

• Every day, six people die from skin cancer in the UK.

www.sunsmart.org.uk