

Frequently Asked Questions

How many times a week can I sensibly use a sunbed?

People with skin type 1; children under 18 and people on certain medications that may cause photosensitivity; people with a history of skin cancer in their family should not use a sunbed at all. Moderate tanning of 2-3 sessions a week is OK for everyone else but ensure you rest the skin for a minimum of 24 hours between each session and at least 48 hours for skin type 2. The European Standard advises not to exceed 60 sessions per annum.

What is a sunbed session?

A sunbed session is the length of time it takes to reach an individual's MED (minimal erythemal dose). This is the point prior to over-exposure and burning, which must always be avoided. A session will therefore depend on the type of sunbed being used, the skin type of the person using it and the development point of their tan. Never sunbathe outdoors on the same day you take a sunbed session.

Why will some sunbed salons let me use their sunbeds for longer sessions?

This depends entirely upon the type of sunbed being offered. The power and UV output can vary considerably from sunbed to sunbed. A professional sunbed operator will advise on the correct session length, dependent upon sunbed, skin type and stage of tan development.

A new regulation now requires all sunbeds to have a maximum irradiance level of 0.3W/m² and this will mean the length of a session will need to be increased to achieve the same dosage.

Is there a link between UV exposure and skin cancer?

There are two types of skin cancer – non-melanoma which can usually be easily treated. The second is malignant melanoma, which if not treated early enough can prove fatal.

Some evidence points to sunburn and over-exposure to UV being one of the possible risk factors in contracting skin cancer. It follows, therefore, that avoiding melanomas can be helped by controlling exposure to UV – particularly in children.

Malignant melanoma is found to be most prevalent on parts of the body not normally exposed to sunlight, suggesting that it is those areas that have to deal with intermittent, excessive doses of UV that are most vulnerable – or that UV over-exposure is not the only cause.

Controlled exposure to UV, either in sunlight or on a sunbed, is important to avoid over-exposure and sunburn

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What are the benefits of using a sunbed?

Sunbeds offer a controlled way to tan and can provide appropriate levels of UV to ensure sufficient levels of Vitamin D are achieved and maintained (see section on Vitamin D for more on this subject).

Tanning in sunlight means the body can be subjected to different levels of UV rays, depending on the time of day, location in the world, month of the year and so on. With a sunbed, a tanning programme can be developed to ensure skin type and the type of sunbed being used, are taken into consideration to ensure that over exposure, including the possibility of burning, is avoided.

Is it true there is no such thing as a safe tan?

No. Tanned skin protects against sunburn, thought to be the main cause of melanoma. If you avoid getting sunburned, the benefits of moderate sun exposure (see Vitamin D section) will far outweigh any risks.

Is unprotected sun exposure unhealthy?

Although precautions do need to be taken, regular, moderate amounts of unprotected UV exposure are absolutely necessary for good health. Independent scientific research has shown that whether you live in a sunny or not-so-sunny climate, but expose yourself to sun, then your subsequent increased production of Vitamin D will help lower the risk of a host of debilitating and fatal diseases including colon, breast, prostate and ovarian cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, Type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis and depression.

Are sunbeds for tanning only?

If you don't have the opportunity to go out in the sun or prefer a more private and controlled environment, indoor tanning facilities represent a viable alternative to natural sunshine for stimulating your production of Vitamin D. However, it is important to remember that the radiation that you are exposed to in an indoor tanning facility is the same as what you get from the sun. That means you need to take the same precautions that you would if you were in natural sunlight.