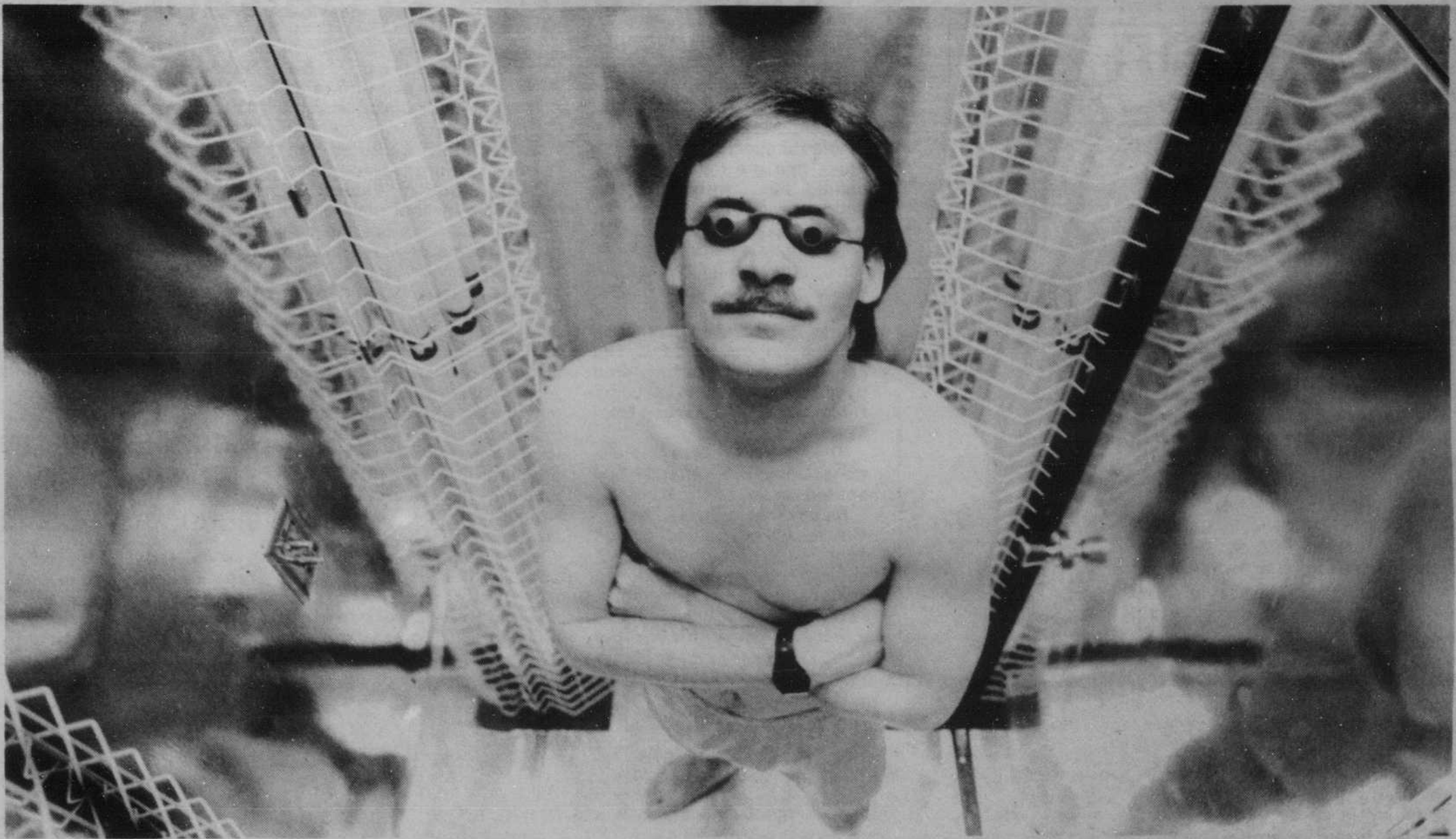




Users of sun salons as well as those taking advantage of Mother Nature should beware of the dangers from excessive exposure.

Hidden dangers lie beneath the perfect TAN

Nothing will turn a head quite like well-proportioned, well-roasted flesh.

But as popular as the perfect tan has become, the evidence is mounting against overexposure to ultraviolet light.

Increasingly, scientists are proving that the penalty for being "overdone-by-the-sun" is more than temporary discomfort and a buss from the Copertone puppy.

The documented effects of overexposure, which is in itself an ambiguous term, include premature skin wrinkling, destructive and unsightly alterations in blood vessels and skin cancer of varying severity that can lead to permanent disfigurement or, in rare cases, death.

As a result of the sun's bad press, tanning buffs have turned to salons. While many use them for convenience, others are swayed by an argument often used by proponents of tanning salons. By using artificial light, salon advocates say they can exclude the "UV-B" light that occurs in natural sunlight.

The conventional wisdom says UV-B light causes the damage associated with overexposure to the sun. Many tanning salons, however,

use UV-B light because it tans faster.

"Previously it was thought that UV-B light was responsible for all sun-related damage," says Dr. Eric Olson of the Dermatology Clinic of Springfield. "But recent studies have shown that UV-A hastens damage to the skin (when used in combination with UV-B.)"

While getting brown under tanning salon UV-A light and avoiding natural sunlight may reduce the damage, Olson says that's "impractical."

"Getting tanning salon light as well as outdoor light is going to cause more damage than just going outside."

If they operate within the guidelines of the Radiation Control and Safety Act of 1968 and the more recent Food and Drug Administration restrictions, tanning salons are legal.

But merely meeting those regulations does not mean that the FDA is convinced that salon operations are safe.

"We don't approve of the use of tanning salons or beds," says Bill Van Pelt, regional radiological health representative for the Seattle FDA office. "All we've done is to say 'these are the minimum standards.'"

Sunlight and artificial light do have some benefits. For example, says Olson, the body uses light to utilize vitamin D.

The scientific community greets some other claims less

enthusiastically.

An item in Eugene's "Network" newspaper recently advertised a lecture by Linda Davidson, co-owner of the Sunshine Station tanning salon in Eugene.

"Strip Down and Get it Brown," the headline reads. "We been taught to believe that sunlight is detrimental to our health, when in fact, ultra violet light increases our body's resistance to infection; improves our electrocardiogram; reduces blood sugar, blood pressure, and blood cholesterol... the health benefit list goes on," the statement reads.

While Davidson says she did not place or write the advertisement, she says the claims are true.

"If you want proof just listen to your body in the summer, how you feel... look how the plants and the trees flourish," says Davidson.

"As far as I know, (Davidson's claims) aren't backed up by scientific study. As a doctor, scientific proof is what I have to go on," says Olson. "There may be anecdotal information that backs up (those claims), but it's not backed up by scientific fact."

"Basically, I'm not very much in favor of (tanning salons), not too enthusiastic about it," says Dr. Amir Moha-Jerin, also of the Dermatology Clinic of Springfield. "Of course, they are very nice for a fast, temporary tan, but sooner or later you will see the reactions from using these."

"Personally, what bothers me is the commercial aspect of tanning salons. The owners have to advertise and get customers to come in and 'get beautiful.' It scares me... it's so easy to bring the young people in. The other thing that bothers me is that they're not going to see the damages for several years."

Like many things, says Moha-Jerin, tanning in moderation will reduce detrimental effects down the road. "But these people that go two or three times a week all year long, they're going to have trouble."

While wary of the effects of ultraviolet rays, dermatologists are also practical.

"Don't get me wrong," says Olson. "I don't advocate staying indoors all the time — I'm an avid outdoors person myself."

"The advice we give is to minimize the amount of sun they get," says Dr. Greg Richterich of the Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland. "But realizing that people like the effects of a suntan, we recommend that they use sun screen and avoid overexposure."

In other words, ultra-violet worshippers, learn not to burn.

**Story by Sean Meyers
Photo by Bob Baker**

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