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Artificial tanning beneficial, but draws doctors' concern

By Sandi Bevans

Of the Emerald

Relax, as you soak up the warmth in Tahiti, Acapulco or Maui. The Wolff Sun Center at 3131 W. 11th lets you tan on a private bed in a room named for the vacation spot of your dreams.

Yet as you get comfortable on the bed of bulbs to begin tanning your winter white skin there's the underlying possibility that you're doing more harm than good.

In tanning beds UVB (burning) rays are minimized while the UVA (tanning) rays are enhanced. But, "The UVA rays are concentrated enough to cause burning in tanning beds," according to James Kitterman M.D., a local dermatologist. Dr. Kitterman also said that skin tans because it's under stress and this is the skin's reaction to the sun.

Another Eugene-area dermatologist, Gregory C. Richterich M.D., feels that the main issue isn't concerning how much UVA and UVB rays are in the beds precisely, "Radiation is radiation," he said.

Despite these concerns, a common item found on a vacationer's checklist these days is a couple of visits to a tanning booth.

This imaginary trip into the sun has become popular as



Photo by Shu-Shing Chen

Justin Boyd, a University sophomore, relaxes while he tans at Sunshower Tanning.

students try to establish their "base tan" indoors before venturing out into the real thing.

Inger and Stan Janemark, owners of Sunshine Station on 643 W. Centennial Blvd. say that it takes 5-10 regular visits to get that base tan. The number of visits required varies because of the different skin types that people have.

"We don't want people to get dark, dark, dark — we just want them to get a little more color and to feel better," Inger said.

Sunshine Station customers range from 16-72 years old and presently are around 60 percent female.

Customers sometimes have reasons other than tanning in mind when they visit tanning places. The Janemark's have had people visit with the intent of easing sore muscles and bad backs or relieving psoriasis and even acne problems.

Both Dr. Richterich and Dr. Kitterman voiced concerns for the regular tanning bed users. Some of the bad effects they have found are pre-mature aging and wrinkling, damage to blood vessels deep in the skin, a variety of skin problems and the increased likelihood of skin cancers.

Kitterman says his advice would be not to use them, but if they are used it should be for pre-vacation purposes. "If the alternative is to go to Hawaii or someplace and get burned, then establishing a base tan would be better," he said. He said the entire business is one of aesthetics, just like cosmetics.

On the other hand, most tanning booth owners seem to be conscientious about educating their individual customers. If someone with fair skin comes in, the Janemark's will advise that person to start at 15 or 20 minutes rather than trying for the 25 minute maximum.

Often, new customers fill out a questionnaire which tells whether or not they've been badly sunburned or had skin problems. This enables the employee to advise the first-time tanner on how long to spend in the bed.

At SunShower Tanning Salon at 874 E. 13th (on campus), manager David Yoshimura finds the customer ratio at about 70 percent female and 30 percent male. He has seen an increase recently in the number of male visitors. "I think it's becoming more acceptable for men," he said.

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