

Sun can be as dangerous as tanning booths, expert says

By Scott Maben
Emerald Managing Editor

Tanning salons, available almost everywhere now, are not a safe substitute for the harmful rays of the sun.

That is the opinion of Dr. John Epstein, a clinical professor of dermatology from the University of California at San Francisco, who spoke at Sacred Heart Hospital recently.

Epstein talked about the prevention, detection and treatment of skin cancer and how each relates to sun exposure and tanning booths during the first in a series of public health education programs offered at the hospital this year.

According to Epstein, tans obtained either naturally or artificially can have serious repercussions down the road,

Evidence of this may be reflected in the fact that, like most cancers, skin cancer occurs at a more mature age, usually between 50 and 70.

But this is easily avoided with some simple prevention measures, he said.

"The most important issue in prevention is convincing the individual that getting a tan isn't cool. It doesn't make you healthier, and if you could only convince people they didn't look healthier, they wouldn't do it," Epstein said.

Epstein listed three ways to evade dangerous rays from the sun and still enjoy the outdoors:

- wear protective clothing,
- steer clear of the sun between 10 a.m. and 3 or 4 p.m. when the most damaging rays are reaching the earth's surface.
- use sun screen.

Epstein said sunscreens will

prevent the acute sunburn response and thus are likely to prevent long-term damage.

However, he said there was no need to use a sun screen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of more than 15, and no sense in using one less than 15. An individual using an SPF-15 sun screen will take 15 times longer to tan than usual.

According to the American Cancer Society, most skin cancers can be prevented by following such guidelines, and 95 percent can be cured if identified and treated quickly.

The most prevalent of all cancers in the U.S. are non-melanoma skin cancers, affecting about half a million people each year, Epstein said. "Almost all of them are due to sun exposure."

Epstein said melanomas, composing about 3 percent of

all cancers that occur, are "increasing in incidence at an alarming rate." Despite the fact that most melanomas also can be cured, the mortality rate from the malignant melanoma has doubled in the United States in the past 20 years, he said.

So far this year, more than 25,800 cases of melanomas have been reported to the ACS.

"If you are a person with lots of moles, or you have light skin, or you've ever had a melanoma, or you have melanomas in the family, stay out of the sun. It's poison."

Although the ACS has not established a correlation between skin cancer and tanning booths, the Oregon Medical Association reports that tanning booths may increase a person's chances of getting skin cancer in the future because of the harmful ultraviolet radiation

produced by the lamps used in these booths.

Epstein's message about using tanning booths was simple: don't use them.

People who can't tan well in the sun will have the same problem in a booth, "despite what is sometimes advertised," he said.

"If you get enough energy to get a tan in these salons, you're damaging the skin. And all you're doing then is adding that damage to the damage you get when you go out. You're just adding further insult and injury to your tissues," he said.

Free examinations for signs of skin cancer will be performed by members of the Lane County Dermatology Association during a health fair at the Discovery Center in Eugene Oct. 4.

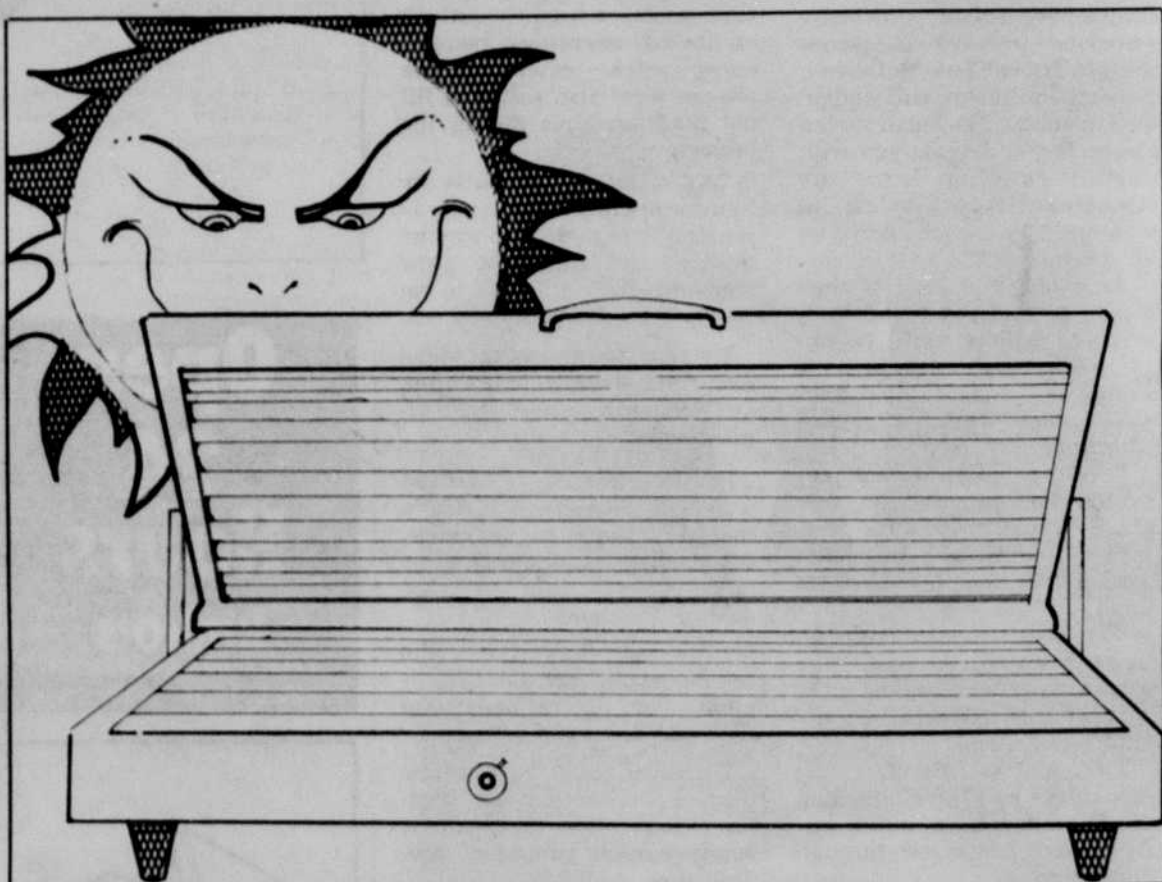
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