Sunless Tanning Cuts Tanning Bed Use

BY MICHELE G. SULLIVAN
Mid-Atlantic Bureau

NEW ORLEANS — Sunless tanning preparations are linked with a decrease in the use of tanning beds and a slight increase in the use of sunscreens, Daniel Sheehan, M.D., said in a poster presentation at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Dermatology.

Although Dr. Sheehan’s survey of 121 people who used such a product indicated that most didn’t change their outdoor sun exposure, the reported decrease in tanning bed exposure could have a positive effect on skin health.

“Traditional ultraviolet light tanning bed use has been linked to melanoma and nonmelanoma skin cancers by recent case-control studies,” commented Dr. Sheehan in an interview. He also said, given this prevalence, physicians should advocate the use of sunless tanning to their patients and their community as a means of decreasing traditional ultraviolet light tanning bed use and UVL exposure.

Dr. Sheehan, of the Medical College of Georgia, Augusta, administered surveys to 121 sunless tanning patrons at two salons. The subjects ranged in age from 14 to 58 years.

The survey group was composed of 78 first-time users and 43 repeat users. About one-quarter of patrons (26%) said sunless tanning decreased their outdoor sun exposure, but most (64%) said it had no effect. Almost one-quarter (23%) said sunless tanning increased their use of sunscreen.

The largest effect was seen in decreased use of tanning beds; 70% said sunless tanning decreased their use of tanning beds. The trend toward decreased outdoor sun exposure and increased sunscreen use may represent additional health benefits of sunless tanning, in addition to the statistically significant decrease in tanning bed use, Dr. Sheehan noted.

The spray-on tanning offered at the salon isn’t cheap. It is at least $20 per session, he said. But there are many over-the-counter preparations that offer similar results at a lower cost. It’s important to remember, however, that patients counseled to use those products should also be counseled to use sunscreen, he added.

Indirect Benefits of Sunless Tanning

26% 23% 70%
Cut tanning bed use Cut outdoor sun exposure Increased sunscreen use

Sunlight and Vitamin D Controversy Heats Up

Endocrinologist author argues exposure promotes vitamin D production, reduces melanoma risk.

BY JANE SALODOF McNIEL
Southwest Bureau

PHOENIX, ARIZ. — Physicians, get ready. This summer, patients are likely to ask whether they should be spending more time in the sun, Darrell R. Rigel, M.D., warned attendees at a clinical dermatology conference sponsored by Medics. He blamed a book, “The UV Advantage” (New York: iBooks, May 2004), which scorns sun avoidance and advocates moderate doses of sunlight for better conversion of vitamin D in the body.

Widespread distribution in tanning salons and coverage in the popular press has piqued public interest, according to Dr. Rigel of New York University.

Illustrating his point, he showed videotape of a “Good Morning America” segment in which he debated the author, Michael Holick, M.D. “There will be a lot of stories this summer about how people should spend more time in the sun,” Dr. Rigel said, urging his audience to have rebuttal data ready to hand.

Dr. Holick, an endocrinologist, is a professor of medicine, physiology, and biophysics at Boston University. He was asked to resign from the department of dermatology after the book’s publication, but he continues to serve as director of the school’s vitamin D, skin, and bone research laboratory and of its general clinical research center.

“There’s no evidence that you increase your risk of melanoma from sensible sun exposure. In fact, it decreases your risk,” he said in a brief telephone interview following Dr. Rigel’s talk.

Here are some of the issues under dispute:

- **Tanning industry support.** Dr. Rigel alleged the tanning industry is the driving force behind the book. “The tanning industry could not claim any health benefits (gained) by going to a tanning salon,” he said, noting that Dr. Holick often speaks at tanning industry functions. “They bankrolled the book… There is a conflict of interest that is not disclosed.”

- **Vitamin D deficiency.** In the book and in a journal article, Dr. Holick warned of “an unrecognized epidemic of Vitamin D deficiency among both children and adults in the United States” (Am. J. Clin. Nutr. 2004;80 suppl. 6:S167S-885). Among the potential consequences, he has listed rickets, worsening of bone diseases such as osteoporosis and osteomalacia, and increased risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and type 1 diabetes mellitus.

- **Sensible sun exposure.** Dr. Holick recommends 5-10 minutes of sun exposure on the face and on the arms and legs or hands and arms two or three times a week, along with increased dietary and supplemental vitamin D.

- **Sunless tanning.** Although about 23% said sunless tanning increased their use of sunscreen, the largest effect was seen in decreased use of tanning beds; 70% said sunless tanning decreased their use of tanning beds.

There’s no reason to suggest to your patients they should expose themselves, because they will get enough otherwise,” he said.

He urged physicians to recommend to their patients that sunscreen be part of a total sun-protection program that includes wearing protective clothing and avoiding the midday sun.

Even with sunscreen, incidental levels of UV light appear to lead to normal levels of vitamin D, he said.

Endocrinologist author argues exposure promotes vitamin D production, reduces melanoma risk.