

# Solariums: a safe way to tan?

Many people believe solariums are a safe way to tan. In fact, the opposite is true. Solariums use artificial ultraviolet radiation or 'UV' to tan the skin. Any type of UV – from the sun or from a solarium – can cause skin damage. It can also lead to skin cancer.

## What are the risks?

While some people desire a tan, it is actually a sign our skin is attempting to protect itself from UV damage.

Solariums can also cause burning, irritation, swelling, blistering and pain. This may continue to develop for up to 72 hours after exposure.

Solariums also cause your skin to age much faster than it should. Use a solarium regularly and you will notice your skin will wrinkle, blotch, sag and may even thicken.

Solarium use can also lead to skin cancer. UV penetrates deep into the skin, damaging skin cells and causing tumours to grow. These tumours can turn into skin cancer, a potentially life threatening disease.

## Safety tips

- If you must use a solarium, limit the time your skin is exposed to UV. Never double up on solarium sessions and always wait at least 48 hours between visits to allow your skin time to recover.
- If you do get burnt while using a solarium, cease all tanning sessions until your skin has completely recovered.
- Seek a medical opinion as to whether you should use solariums again.
- Some medications can make your skin more susceptible to UV damage. If in doubt, ask your doctor.
- Avoid sunbaking outdoors and always protect your skin if you do go out in the sun.
- You must wear eye goggles when using a solarium. Given the skin on your face is so delicate, it is recommended that you never tan your face.
- If you use a solarium bed, make sure it has been hygienically cleaned before use.



For information and support call  
Monday to Friday, 8am – 8pm

[www.cancerqld.org.au](http://www.cancerqld.org.au)

## How solariums work

Solariums produce concentrated ultraviolet (UV) radiation. In fact, solariums can emit UV up to five times as strong as the summer midday sun. Solarium clients either lie down on a UV bed, stand in front of a panel or angle a sun lamp over their skin.

UV prompts skin cells to produce pigment or 'melanin', causing our skin to appear tanned. Tanning happens rapidly as UV from a solarium is much more intense than natural UV from the sun.

## Can everyone use a solarium?

Not everyone can tan in a solarium. If you are fair or burn easily, you shouldn't use a solarium. Those under the age of 18 should also avoid solariums, as your skin is very sensitive to UV damage.

If you have had a skin cancer removed then you should definitely not use a solarium.

What is important to know is that all skin types will burn if exposed to excessive amounts of UV. In addition, all skin types will suffer skin damage if constantly exposed to UV over time.

## What information is available?

When you use a solarium, salon staff should fully explain the risks involved. They should display a health warning sign and provide a consent form, so you understand the health risks involved.

If the solarium does not provide you with this information or if you are suspicious they may be misleading you, think carefully about using their machines. Seek a second opinion, preferably from your doctor.

# A few truths about solariums

## Controlled tanning

You may have heard that solariums are a safe or 'controlled' way to tan.

Solarium salons attempt to 'control' the tanning process by reducing the particular UV (UVB) that causes sunburn. Burning will still occur if sufficient time is spent in a solarium.

While this may reduce your risk of burning, it in no way reduces your risk of permanent skin damage or skin cancer. The type of UV (UVA) used in solariums can still cause skin damage, premature ageing and may lead to skin cancer.

Solarium salons may also claim a solarium is controlled as you only use them for short periods of time. Don't forget that solarium UV is concentrated, so even a short time in a solarium is enough to cause damage.

## Building a base tan

Solarium salons may encourage you to build a base tan by using lower dose solariums and gradually building up to high pressure machines as your tan builds.

A tan is not adequate protection against sunburn and skin damage. Even people with a tan can still suffer skin damage after using a solarium.

## Health benefits

A solarium cannot reduce your risk of developing skin conditions or cancer, like breast, skin or colon cancer. It is also not suitable as a treatment for depression or seasonal mood disorder. Solariums are not necessary to boost vitamin D levels. The majority of Australians produce enough vitamin D from the sun exposure they receive through their everyday activities.

## Tanning alternatives

Many people are opting for their natural skin colour and enjoying healthier skin as a result.

The safer alternative to solarium tanning or sunbaking is using fake tan.

Just remember that fake tan provides no extra protection for your skin against sun damage.

**Limiting your time in a solarium or using a solarium occasionally will still increase your risk of skin damage. Any time in a solarium adds to the total amount of UV your skin receives; the more UV, the higher the risk.**