VALLEYHEALTH

What You Need to Know About Tanning

As summer arrives, many people head outside or to tanning beds hoping for that golden glow. But too much sun—or artificial tanning—can harm your skin and health. This guide explains how tanning works, what risks to watch out for, and how to protect yourself.

What Are UV Rays?

The sun gives off different kinds of ultraviolet (UV) rays:

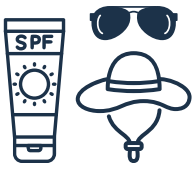
- **UVA and UVB rays** reach your skin and can cause damage.
- **UVC rays** are mostly absorbed by the Earth's atmosphere and don't usually reach us.

Too much UVA and UVB exposure can lead to sunburn, skin damage, early aging, and even skin cancer.

Is Any Sun Exposure Safe?

Some sun exposure is okay—it helps your body make vitamin D. But too much sun without protection can be dangerous.

Use the **UV Index** to guide your outdoor plans:



- If the **UV Index is 3 or higher,** wear protection like sunscreen, a hat, sunglasses, or clothing that covers your skin.
- Try to stay out of the sun during peak hours (10 AM to 4 PM), when rays are strongest.

Smart Sunscreen Use

Sunscreen is a great way to protect your skin. Here's how to use it the right way:

- Choose a **broad-spectrum SPF 30 or higher** (blocks both UVA and UVB).
- **Apply 15–30 minutes before** going outside.
- **Reapply every 2 hours,** or sooner if you're swimming or sweating.
- Don't wait until you're already at the beach or ball field—apply ahead of time!

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What About a "Base Tan"?

Many people think a base tan helps prevent burns. But:

- **A tan is still skin damage.** It's your body's way of trying to protect itself.
- Both tans and sunburns increase your risk of skin problems later in life.

Tanning Beds vs. Self-Tanners

Not all tans come from the sun, but some are still risky.

- **Tanning beds** use UV rays too—they **increase the risk of melanoma,** a dangerous skin cancer.
- **Self-tanning products** like lotions or sprays are **much safer.** They don't use UV rays and can still give you a sun-kissed look.

Know the Signs of Skin Cancer

If you notice changes in your skin, it's important to check with a doctor. Use the **ABCDE rule:**

- **A**—Asymmetry: one half doesn't match the other
- **B**—Border: edges are uneven or blurry
- **C**—Color: more than one shade or unusual color
- **D**—Diameter: larger than 6mm (about the size of a pencil eraser)
- **E**—Evolving: it changes in size, shape, or color

Early detection is key, so don't ignore unusual spots.

Enjoy the sunshine—but protect your skin. Use sunscreen, seek shade, and skip the tanning beds. If you're looking for a glow, safer options like self-tanners are available.

If you have questions or notice changes in your skin, Valley Health is here to help. Contact us to talk with a healthcare provider today.