

Fake tanning

Key point

- Having a fake tan does not protect your skin from the harmful effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation.
- There are fake tanning lotions available that contain sunscreen, but the protection only lasts a few hours, not the length of time that the colour remains.

Thankfully, some Australians are starting to think like Nicole Kidman and Cate Blanchett – that their natural skin colour is beautiful. But if you still prefer to have tanned skin, it is far better to get it from a bottle instead of from the sun or in a solarium.

Using a fake tan is just like dyeing your skin – the change is only on the outside. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation can still penetrate the skin, damaging the cells below and increasing your risk of melanoma and other skin cancers. There are various types of fake-tanning products:

Lotions, creams and sprays

- The most common products are those that you apply directly onto your skin. They contain a chemical called dihydroxyacetone (DHA), which binds with your dead skin cells and changes the colour of your skin. The colour comes off when the dead skin cells flake off – about a week after application. DHA is safe on your skin, but it's best to avoid areas around your mouth and eyes.

Spray tanning, available in beauty salons, hairdressers and some gyms, uses misters to apply an even coat of fake tan solution. The spray is safe for your skin, but it's important to protect your eyes and not breathe in the mist.

Bronzers

- These are cosmetics such as tinted moisturisers, foundation and powders. These products don't contain DHA and they wash off with soap and water.

Tanning tablets

- Tanning pills usually contain low doses of beta-carotene, a chemical that produces the colour of some vegetables, such as carrots. These tablets give the skin an orange colour, which can last for several weeks on the palms and soles. The tablets don't protect against UV radiation.

Tanning pills that contain high amounts of beta-carotene and/or a chemical called canthaxanthin have been linked with dangerous side effects, including damage to the eyes and the liver.

Tanning accelerators

- Tan 'accelerators' or tan 'promoters' are available in lotion and pill form, and claim to speed up the natural tanning process by stimulating melanin production in the body. There is no evidence that these products work.

Melanotan

- Melanotan is a synthetic compound that mimics the activity of a natural skin hormone, alpha-MSH, which stimulates the skin's cells to secrete melanin, the pigment that gives skin its colour. Melanotan is being trialled in Australia for its photo-protective properties and its potential to reduce the risk of sunburn, skin damage and skin cancer, especially in fair-skinned individuals.

Melanotan is not available for sale in Australia; however, as melanotan has not been approved for sale by the Therapeutic Goods Association (TGA), the safety and any potential side effects of this treatment are still unknown.

Cancer Council NSW recommends that when the **UV Index** is 3 or above, you should protect your skin in five ways:

- Slip on clothing that covers your arms and legs
- Slop on 30+, broad-spectrum sunscreen
- Slap on a broad-brimmed, bucket or legionnaire hat
- Seek shade
- Slide on wrap-around sunglasses.

For more information on skin cancer prevention and sun protection, visit our website www.cancercouncil.com.au/sunsmart.