

Future of self-tanning lotion looks bright

RESEARCH

This year, an estimated 1.3 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States. With skin cancer rates on the rise, it's no wonder more Americans are turning to the bottle ... of self-tanning lotions, that is.

Instead of basking in the sun and exposing themselves to damaging ultraviolet (UV) radiation for the sake of a tan, consumers are playing it smart and finding that self-tanning products or sunless tanners are a healthy alternative to achieving a golden glow.

Speaking recently at the American Academy of Dermatology's 2000 Annual Meeting in San Francisco, dermatologist Stanley B. Levy, MD and adjunct clinical professor of dermatology at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine, discussed the increased popularity of self-tanners and new medical benefits associated with their use.

Sunless or self-tanning lotions contain an active ingredient known as dihydroxyacetone (DHA), a colorless sugar that darkens the skin by staining. DHA works by interacting with the dead surface cells found in the epidermis, or the outermost layer of the skin, producing a color change. As the dead skin cells are naturally sloughed off, the color gradually fades - typically within five to seven days of a single application.

Similar-sounding products on the market that rely on other ingredients to darken the skin - such as tanning preparations, tan accelerators, bronzers, tanning promoters and tanning pills - are not as effective as sunless or self-tanners containing DHA. In fact, tanning pills that contain an ingredient called canthaxanthin have been linked to hepatitis and urticaria, a condition marked by severe itching and skin eruptions. They are not commercially available in the United States.

"As a first step, consumers really need to look at the packaging of these products to ensure that what they are really buying is a self-tanner that contains DHA and not one of these other products that claim to be a tanning aid," cautioned Dr. Levy. "Significant improvements have been made in the formulas of self-tanners in recent years, making them easier to use with better results."

Not sun-proof

Consumers using self-tanning products that contain DHA need to be aware that although the skin will darken, these products provide limited sun protection. Although some self-tanning products are adding sunscreens to their formulas to provide sun protection, the stated SPF for these products only lasts for a few hours after application and not for the duration of the color change induced by the DHA.

While the DHA in sunless tanners provides very modest protection against ultraviolet-B (UVB) radiation, possibly an SPF 2 or 3, a recent study showed that the brown color produced on the skin by DHA may also provide significant protection from ultraviolet-A (UVA) rays.

Both UVA and UVB have been linked to skin cancer and premature aging of the skin. However, UVA has a longer wavelength than UVB, penetrating deeper into the skin to cause damage to its elastic fibers.

"The study showed a dose response relationship from the concentration of DHA used to color the skin - in this case from 2.5 percent to 6.5 percent - and the UVA protection factor it provided," explained Dr. Levy. "The highest DHA concentration studied produced the darkest color change on the skin and the highest level of UVA protection. While these results are promising, more studies should be conducted to confirm this relationship."

"Consumers need to be aware that while the darkened skin color produced by sunless tanners may offer some limited UVA protection, there is no damage done to the skin to achieve this color change," added Dr. Levy. "Skin darkened through

the sun or tanning beds, however, is actually damaged by UV radiation in the process, and any UVA protection that may result from it does not make up for the fact that the damage has already occurred."

Psoriasis benefit

Another recent study found a link between the UVA protective properties of DHA and a therapy used to treat psoriasis: topical ultraviolet-lighting barrier to optimize PUVA, commonly known as Turbo-PUVA. Applying DHA to the unaffected skin of psoriasis patients during standard PUVA photochemotherapy treatment - in which a carefully measured amount of a special form of ultraviolet light is directly administered to the areas of the skin affected by psoriasis - proved to be beneficial.

The DHA, which was applied to the skin in concentrations of 15 percent, compared to the 3-5 percent commonly found in over-the-counter sunless tanners, allowed higher doses of UVA to be tolerated and delivered to the

psoriatic plaques, resulting in faster clearing and fewer treatments.

"The research in the health-related benefits of sunless tanners is really exciting, and I think we'll continue to learn of new uses for these products in the future," added Dr. Levy.

In addition to the light, medium and dark shades on the product labels that indicate DHA concentrations, sunless tanners are now being formulated for specific skin types. For dry skin, sunless tanners can be formulated by adding emollients or humectants to add moisture to the skin. Consumers with oily skin might find that products formulated in gel or alcoholic forms work better for them.

Active ingredients such as vitamins; botanical extracts, antioxidants, anti-irritants and alpha hydroxy acids can also be added to broaden the potential benefits of sunless tanners containing DHA.

For more information, contact the AAD at 1-888-462-DEDERM or www.aad.org.

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Items for Medical Datebook are welcome. Items should be sent to: Observer Newspapers, 38251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, e-mail rskoglund@oe.com, homecomm.net or faxed to (734) 591-7279.

MON, JUNE 5

FIBROMYALGIA
A fibromyalgia conference will take place 7-9 p.m. at the Livonia Civic Center Library, 32777 Five Mile Road, Livonia. \$10 fee, cash only. Call Sharon at (248) 344-0895 or (248) 344-4063.

JUNE 5, 12 & 26

BLOOD PRESSURE SCREENINGS
St. Mary Hospital of Livonia will sponsor community blood pressure screenings on the following Mondays: 1-3 p.m. June 5 in the hospital's lobby at 36475 Five Mile Road; 8-10 a.m. June 12 at

Wonderland Mall in Livonia; and noon to 2 p.m. June 26 at the Northville Senior Center. Call (734) 655-8940.

TUES, JUNE 6

DIABETES AWARENESS
The Meijer Pharmacy (Eight Mile and Haggerty) in Northville will host a Diabetic Health Awareness Day 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The event will showcase diabetic supplies and information about the disease. Promotions include a free blood glucose meter with the purchase of a box of chemistrips (100 ct). Call (248) 349-2707.

BASIC CPR

Providence Hospital & Medical Centers will offer a Heart Saver Plus/PBIA Plus Course 6-10 p.m. at the Livonia Mission Health Center, 37595 Seven Mile Road, Livonia. Program meets the needs of day-care

providers. Registration required. Call (877) 345-5500.

COMMUNICATION GAP
Relax and have fun in this Botsford Hospital Health Development Network-sponsored workshop that looks at the differing communication styles of men and women. Preregistration and \$20 fee required. For more information, call (248) 477-6100.

JUNE 6-29

DIABETES
St. Mary Hospital's "Taking Charge of Living with Diabetes" class meets 7-9 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays for four weeks. Call (734) 655-8940.

WED, JUNE 7

STOP SMOKING
Providence Hospital will host a smoking cessation program 6:30-8:30 p.m. Call (877) 345-5500.

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