

Tanning booths can overcome Canadians' susceptibility to vitamin D deficiency, which is linked to cancer in new studies

Vital tanning

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While the Canadian indoor tanning industry is primarily a cosmetic service, an undeniable physiological side effect is the vitamin D that Canadians obtain from indoor tanning sessions.

Independent research has shown that indoor-tanning clients have 90% higher vitamin D blood levels than non-tanners and, consequently, higher bone mineral density readings. Moreover, healthy vitamin D levels are associated with lower risks of 17 forms of cancer, heart disease, multiple sclerosis, and osteoporosis, as well as several other conditions. Researchers in 1998 discovered that vitamin D — long known to assist the body's ability to absorb calcium and thus improve bone health — also is key to regulating cell growth in the body.

In addition, of 63 epidemiologic and observational studies that have examined the potential relationship between vitamin D sufficiency and a lower risk of colon, breast, ovarian and prostate cancers, a majority suggest a protective connection for vitamin D.

Because of mounting evidence that vitamin D deficiency is prevalent in Canadian society — an estimated 97% of Canadians are vitamin D deficient at some point in the year, according to University of Calgary research — and because Canada's northerly latitude limits natural vitamin D production outdoors four to six months out of the year, the benefit of the vitamin D side effect from cosmetic tanning deserves due consideration as a strategy for maintaining optimum vitamin D levels.

Humans make most of their vitamin D naturally when their skin is exposed to ultraviolet B rays in sunlight. That is how Mother Nature intended it. Diet is



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The benefits of indoor tanning outweigh the risks.

an unreliable source of vitamin D — unless you eat a tremendous amount of fatty fish or more than a half-gallon of whole milk every day. Dietary supplements are effective and do play an important role, but are admittedly not natural, nor are they as universally available to the population as sun exposure.

That's why vitamin D researchers attending two major international conferences in Canada last year confirmed the growing consensus that vitamin D deficiency is a worldwide problem and that vitamin D recommendations should be raised significantly from their current levels.

Further, a recent abstract of a clinical study to be published in the *June American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* showed that healthy vitamin D levels de-

creased overall cancer incidence by 60% — twice the positive net effect on cancer that being a non-smoker has on overall health.

Such results harken back to the professional indoor-tanning industry's origins: It was first established in the 1970s in Northern Europe as a therapeutic exercise in light-deprived areas. A sun-tan was then considered a secondary side effect.

In the 1980s, the North American tanning market emerged as a cosmetic industry. In contrast to its European roots, the North American tanning market has focused for years on the non-medical, cosmetic advantages of having a sun-tan. Either way, clients who patronize professional tanning studios enjoy the health psychological and physiological benefits that have been or are strongly suspected to be associated with ultraviolet light and vitamin D.

Tanning lamps that emit some UVB light, and most of them do, have been shown by peer-reviewed research to stimulate vitamin D production in the skin and elevate blood levels of vitamin D in the body. While it is not necessary to develop a tan to produce sufficient amounts of vitamin D, and while dietary supplements are an alternative, sun exposure is the body's natural way to produce vitamin D.

The indoor tanning industry believes that for those individuals who can develop tans, the cosmetic and vitamin D-related benefits of non-burning exposure to ultraviolet light in appropriate moderation outweigh the easily manageable risks associated with overexposure and sunburn.

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