

# SKIN CARE

By Timothy C. Fritz, C.S.C.S. | Photography by Jay Rusovich

There's nothing like a great tan to put the finishing touch on your hard, muscled body. Not only does it make you look better, but there's something about the sun-induced color and glow that makes you feel better, too. With summer upon us, now is the time to be outside, to show off all your hard work in the gym and to soak up some rays.

But before you strip down and race to your favorite summer sun spot, you need to know some summer skin care basics. This isn't a "women only" infomercial, so you guys need to pay attention, too. Unless you think the nickname "Leatherface" has a catchy ring or you're looking forward to the adventure of battling skin cancer, I suggest you read on ...

How to  
accentuate your  
hard-earned  
muscle with  
a safe,  
healthy  
glow

## GIMME SOME SKIN

Contrary to what some of you guys might think, the skin is your body's largest organ. It provides a protective layer between your delicate inner body and the harsh elements of your surrounding environment. Among other functions, the skin regulates body temperature, serves as a receptor of sensory stimuli and synthesizes vitamin D precursors in the presence of sunlight.

Sunlight—more specifically ultraviolet (UV) radiation—is responsible for the changes in skin color that we refer to as “tanning.” Everyone's baseline skin color is different, depending on the amount of melanin present in his or her dermis (the outermost layer of skin). When exposed to UV radiation, melanin production increases and its color darkens.

“Sun tanning has always been associated with good health and envious sex appeal. Lying in the sun is relaxing

and, at the same time, exhilarating. You get the feeling of well-being,” says Jerome Z. Litt, M.D., a Cleveland, Ohio, dermatologist and author of the new book *Your Skin From A to Z* (published by Barricade Books). “The sad truth,” he adds, “is that sun tanning is a dangerous habit with no benefit except the elusive psychological one: looking good and healthy means feeling good and healthy.”

## THE ALMIGHTY SUN GOD

The sun has been worshipped in one way or another since the beginning of time. Its light and radiation provide the basis for life on our planet. But like anything else, too much of a good thing can be harmful, if not deadly. The sun's radiation can do unseen damage to your skin and its genetic composition.

## ULTRAVIOLET RADIATION

Radiation. That one word brings to mind thoughts of destruction and mutation. Unfortunately, that's exactly what the invisible rays from the sun and tanning beds do to your skin. The radiation detrimental to skin health is in the UV spectrum—UVA and UVB.

UVA rays are deep penetrating, making them ideal for tanning yet empowering them with the greatest potential for skin damage. Wrinkles and photoaging are most attributed to UVA exposure, UVB rays are stronger and thought to be primarily responsible for sunburn, cataracts and most skin cancers. It's difficult to strictly classify either type of radiation, however, as both UVA and UVB can cause untold damage.

Some conditions associated with sun exposure are immediate, including sunburn, alterations in skin pigmentation and sun allergies. Others, like cataracts, skin cancer and suppression of the immune system, develop over time.

“The biggest problem is that these [latter conditions] do not occur immediately—within a week of sun exposure—but are more likely to appear a decade or two later,” says Mark Naylor, M.D., associate professor of dermatology, University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center. “This makes people incorrectly conclude that these changes are due to aging, when the majority of them are due to sun exposure.”





a fashion statement. Tightly woven materials block more sunlight while lighter colors are better at reflecting it. Regardless of material type or color, most lose their ability to filter sunlight when wet.

Hats and sunglasses are also important weapons in the fight against skin damage. Baseball caps are cool and stylish, but wide-brimmed hats like those worn by golfers (Jesper Parnevik not included) offer greater protection. Opt for sunglasses that provide 100 percent UV protection. The ones on the rack at the gas station may not be the best choice, but spending \$200 is no guarantee of ade-

quate UV filtration either.

Dr. Litt offers this simple advice as you head outdoors: "To prevent sun damage, remember to slip, slap and slop!—slip on a shirt, slap on a hat and slop on some sunscreen."

## THE BOTTOM LINE

A nice tan looks and feels good. So do bulging biceps, tree-trunk legs and a rippled midsection. But at what cost are you willing to pursue them? There's a safe, healthy way to achieve either. As far as the tan is concerned, you really need to set your vanity aside for a moment and ask yourself how important it really is. Is being tan for a few months during the year worth the cost of permanent skin damage?

Think about that the next time you decide to relax in the sun for another 15 minutes before applying sunscreen. A small investment in precaution and common sense today will pay big dividends later in life.

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### References

<sup>1</sup>American Academy of Dermatology

recently examined the short-term effects of UV exposure from tanning salons.<sup>1</sup> Eleven subjects agreed to participate in 10 tanning sessions, exposing their entire body to UV radiation over a period of two weeks. The findings showed that molecular changes in the skin and blood were comparable to those found following exposure to the sun. The noted alterations are thought to be critical in the overall process of skin cancer development. According to S. Elizabeth Whitmore, M.D., co-author of the study, "This is the first study to examine and show that similar molecular damage occurs with indoor UV exposure as found with outdoor UV exposure."

Another study published earlier this year added to the ever-growing body of support that tanning beds contribute to skin cancer development.<sup>2</sup> Scientists from the Dartmouth Medical

School interviewed over 1,400 individuals: 603 that had been diagnosed with basal cell carcinoma, 293 with squamous cell carcinoma and 540 who had not been diagnosed with skin cancer (to serve as control subjects). All participants were asked detailed questions about past exposure to sun, use of tanning devices and other information related to skin cancer risk. The results showed a significant correlation between basal/squamous cell skin cancer and the use of tanning devices.

### References

<sup>1</sup>Wong, S.D., Setlow, R., Berrick, R., Hobdy, D., Nurgook, J.A., Kopf, A.W., and Bart, R.S. Ultraviolet A and melanoma: a review. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. 44(5): 819-40. 2001.

<sup>2</sup>Whitmore S.E., Marston, E.L., Puttin, C.S., and Chabakki, C. Tanning salon exposure and molecular alterations. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. 44(5): 775-80. 2001.

<sup>3</sup>Geoghegan, M.R., Stannard, S.A., Netti, L.A., Slatney, M.J., Spoons, S.K., and Weinstock, M.A. Use of tanning devices and risk of basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*. 94(3): 224-6. 2002.