



FAKE TANS

What makes a fake tan?

A tan, whether obtained by exposure to the sun or a solarium, damages your skin and increases your risk of skin cancer. Although the Cancer Institute NSW encourages everyone to embrace their natural skin colour, some people will still wish to look tanned and may use cosmetic products to obtain a fake tan.

Tanning lotions, sprays and creams contain a chemical or vegetable dye called dihydroxyacetone (DHA). This chemical undergoes a reaction with the dead skin cells in the upper layer of the skin which stains them and gives a tanned appearance. As the dead skin flakes off, this appearance fades, usually after about a week.

Fake tanning products usually contain 3 to 5% DHA and professional products can contain up to 15%; the higher the concentration of DHA, the darker the tan. While DHA is considered safe for application on the skin, there is little research on its safety via ingestion or inhalation or to the lips, eyes or mucus membranes, so these areas should be protected when obtaining a spray tan.

Bronzers and tinted sunscreen which give the skin a temporary colour which washes off with water do not contain DHA.

A fake tan can also be obtained with tablets which contain low doses of beta-carotene, a vitamin A related chemical which is responsible for the orange colour of oranges. These tablets give the skin an orange colour which can remain for several weeks.

Outside of Australia, there are tablets available which contain high amounts of beta-carotene and/or a chemical called canthaxanthine, these can damage the liver and eyes.

Is a fake tan a safe tan?

A fake tan does not cause damage to your skin in the same way sunlight and solariums do, however, a fake tan does not provide protection against UV radiation or skin cancer. Some fake tans contain a sunscreen but this will only protect the skin for a few hours and not for the duration of the 'tan'. Fake tans stain the skin, but they do not stimulate the production of melanin; your skin is as vulnerable as before the fake tan. If using a fake tan remember that you still need to follow the five steps to protect yourself from the sun.

We encourage people to embrace their natural skin colour, but some may still wish to look tanned and can use cosmetic products to obtain a fake tan.

1. Seek shade
2. Wear sun protective clothing
3. Wear a broad brimmed hat
4. Wear sunglasses
5. Apply SPF30+ broad spectrum water resistant sunscreen

And if you have further concerns or questions about any product, read the product information carefully. If you are still unsure, contact the manufacturer or your beautician.

Further Information: Cancer Institute NSW www.darksideoftanning.com.au

