

Teachers are often asked to educate students on proper sun safety for students on school trips or during recess or with regards to tanning studios. Teachers themselves must consider the best approach to their own relationship with the sun.

We know that excess ultraviolet exposure contributes to the formation of skin cancer. Light is also the greatest factor in inducing aging of the skin. You can detect this effect by looking at the texture, discoloration and wrinkling of the skin on your face, upper chest and backs of hands compared to the skin on non sun exposed areas such as the buttocks.

To be sure, the sun has good effects as well. It feels relaxing to bask in the sun on a nice day. Vitamin D metabolism is promoted by sun exposure which is increasingly recognized as important in preserving bone health as well as reducing some internal

cancers. Some skin conditions such as psoriasis, eczema and even acne can benefit from a bit of natural sun exposure. While the desire to protect the

skin from sun has become emphasized in the last few decades, there can be some confusion as proponents of increasing Vitamin D as well as those selling tanning salon sessions argue against our new keenness to avoid excess sun exposure.

Like most things in life, a moderate approach is likely the best one. The amount of sun required to stimulate Vitamin D formation is estimated to be minutes a day. Therefore deep tanning and excessive exposure is not warranted. While sunscreens are getting better, UVB still gets through; being outside with sun block on still allows some ultraviolet through to contribute to this beneficial effect. Not many people are obsessive enough with sunscreens or clothing to significantly shut down Vitamin D production significantly. Vitamin D supplementation through foods and tablets is a wise precaution for most people, especially those who assiduously avoid sun. In any case, there is no rationale for aggressive tanning or burning to try to boost a healthy Vitamin D level.

Burning your skin in the sun is dangerous. It has a particular triggering effect for the

most severe form of skin cancer—melanoma. Persistent low grade tanning may have more effect on more minor forms of skin cancer and aging. You should know

your skin type—easy to burn, moderate, resistant to burn—so you can gauge your behaviour with regards to sun exposure. As well, there is some evidence that sun exposure and damage incurred at a younger age is more damaging so special care should

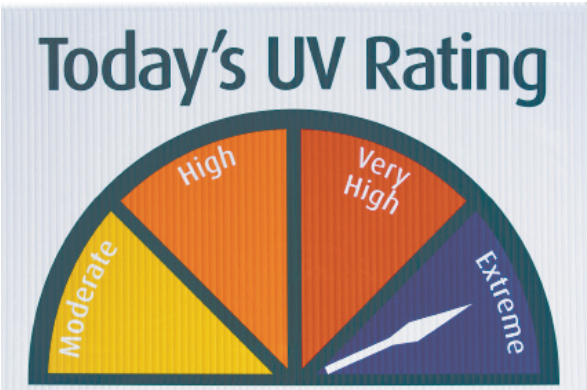
be given to young students and infants out in the sun.

What about tanning salons? We see them promoted as great for the new desire to boost Vitamin D. The main wavelength used in salons, UVA, has little effect on boosting Vitamin D levels. It is better to have a few minutes in the regular sun or take 1000 units of Vitamin D a day. UVA is also the main contributor to skin aging. So salon tanning is the worst thing anyone concerned with avoiding accelerated wrinkling and aging can do. If you simply must have a tan, buy a bronzer or self-tanning agent instead. But remember to keep using a sun block, as this type of tan gives no real protection from burning.

Therefore, enjoy a moderate amount of sun, but protect yourself from burning by using sunscreens. Make sure your sunscreen has good UVB and UVA coverage. You can ask your pharmacist for advice regarding this or look for the seal of approval from the Canadian Dermatology Association to be sure. Apply the sunscreen every few hours during the day and reapply after swimming or sweating.



Do not go to tanning salons as they age skin to an alarming degree as well as contribute to skin cancer. They do not significantly protect you from a sunburn on your trip down south as the wavelengths are not reflective of the burning rays you will experience on a trip. There is no safe exposure to artificial tanning; it may be relaxing, but it is still bad for you.



did you KNOW?

The Early Intervention Program (EIP) invites NSTU members to sign up for our Wellness email list at **Be_Well@nstu.ca**.

Please contact Erin at ekeefe@nstu.ca to provide her with your NSTU email address. The **Be_Well@nstu.ca** list will provide information about the EIP and other wellness topics.



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