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# “STOP SUN-SHAMING ME!”

You wore SPF, shades, a hat the size of a Hula-Hoop—yet you *still* got tan.

How bad is it? **Angela Ledgerwood** takes on the tanning taboo.

**I SPENT MY CHILDHOOD** in the sun. Growing up in Australia, my siblings and I competed for Best Tan with my dad—his entire body glistening with coconut oil as he sat in his beach chair, angled directly at the sun. When we yelled, “Dad, you’re roasting!” I now realize that we were literally correct.

Back then we war-painted our faces with fluorescent zinc, more for dramatic effect than to buffer us from what might be the fiercest sun in the world. And while I’d sometimes dot sunscreen on my step-brothers’ moles or request a little cream on my back, our bodies were offered up like sacrifices to the sun. We didn’t want to get lobster red—just the right shade of pink that, thanks to our natural pigmentation, would turn into the perfect bronze over the next few days.

That changed in my early 20s. After a year abroad in New York, I returned to Sydney and saw my friends with fresh eyes. Suddenly, they didn’t just look tan, they looked...a little *weathered*. Almost immediately, I started following the lead of some American friends, applying SPF-rich face lotion every day. I even got a hat for beach days. Worshipping the sun no longer seemed smart—or necessary since, after experimenting with various sunscreen levels, I discovered I could slather myself with SPF 30, spend most of the day outside, and emerge—burn-free—with naturally sun-kissed skin. I thought I’d found a happy, healthy medium. Until, that is, the sun-shaming started.

Certain health-conscious friends called my tan reckless....My dermatologist guilt-tripped me during an annual skin exam. Come on—wasn’t *some* sun good for you, or was there really no such thing as a healthy glow?

As I suspected, most of the derms I talked to (mine included) had a clear-cut answer. “Absolutely not,” says Jennifer MacGregor, MD, clinical professor of dermatology at Columbia University. “*Any* change in skin color, whether it’s a tan or burn, is a sign of skin damage.” That’s because as soon as UV rays penetrate skin, pigment production goes into overdrive, acting as a protective shield. The effect is less dramatic if you’re wearing sunscreen but still a sign you’ve had too much.

UV radiation causes DNA mutations that can lead to all three types

of skin cancer, including the most fatal and increasingly common one among 20somethings: melanoma.

Because of this, dermatologists swear by daily use of broad-spectrum SPF 30—even on gray days or when you’re spending the majority of time indoors (UV rays sneak through clouds and windows). As for amount? “I always encourage people to put more on than they think they need,” says Heidi Waldorf, MD, a New York City dermatologist. That’s because most of us are guilty of a skimpy, sloppy application, making an SPF 30 function more like an SPF 15. You need at least half a teaspoon of sunscreen to protect your whole face and a shot-glass, or about an ounce, for your body.

I get that derms have to overcompensate for foolish behavior. But I was doing most things right: applying it head-to-toe on sun-day fun-days, plus wearing a day cream with SPF 30 daily. I’m just biologically programmed to turn bronze!

I decided to get a different type of doctor’s perspective. I’d read about the benefits of sun exposure as a means of spiking our natural levels of vitamin D, so I sought out one of the main proponents of this camp, Frank Lipman, MD, an integrative and functional medicine physician and founder of Eleven-Eleven Well-

Zalan Zinc Sticks, \$12 for eight, [zalanonline.com](http://zalanonline.com)

The writer loves the sun...but loathes the guilt.



# Fun, Fearless Beauty

ness Center, in New York. (Medical gurus, such as Dr. Oz, as well as health fanatics, like Gwyneth Paltrow, endorse some of his practices.)

"I have a problem calling the sun a *problem*," says Dr. Lipman. "In the past 50 years, the medical community has demonized the sun in the same way it did fat and salt a decade ago—and today we know certain fats are good for you and salt is not necessarily bad."

According to Dr. Lipman, sun exposure is integral to our health and well-being, as it's one of the few ways we can get vitamin D. (He believes you can't fully meet your daily requirement solely through food.) Often called the miracle vitamin, D helps with muscle strength, builds bones, has anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer effects (ironic considering the sun/skin-cancer issue), and bolsters your immune system. "But D deficiency has become a big problem, primarily because people are petrified of the sun," says Dr. Lipman. While supplements exist, he thinks the real deal is superior.

That's not license to bake like a chip, he says. The doc recommends 15 to 30 minutes (max) of unprotected sun exposure (sunscreen impedes the vitamin's absorption) during off-peak hours (that's before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m.) and suggests using SPF on sensitive areas—the face, ears, neck, and chest. "As long as your arms or legs are exposed, you'll get your daily dose of D," Dr. Lipman explains. And he agrees with the dermatology community's sunscreen stance during peak hours

## Be Sun-Smart

How to keep a good thing from becoming a health hazard.

### Watch the clock.

Always wear SPF between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.—and apply it 30 minutes before heading out (it takes that long for the chemicals to absorb). Outside all day? Reapply every two hours or right after a swim or sweat session.

**Think of your past.** Had bad sunburns as a kid? Be extra vigilant as an adult. You're doubly at risk for melanoma.

### Consider your skin

**tone.** Redheads, blondes, and light-eyed beauties are most at risk for skin cancer. While less common in dark-skinned women, it's often diagnosed at advanced stages, so it's harder to treat.

**Spot treat.** Apply extra SPF to freckles or dark spots—they're signs of sun damage.

### Get annual skin checks.

In this painless exam (a must for everyone), a dermatologist will check for suspicious spots that could be—or lead to—skin cancer.

—LAUREN BALSAMO

(read: wear it!).

Of course, Dr. Lipman's tactic could mean getting *some* color over time. But according to Dr. Lipman, as long as it's not a burn, that's okay. Any dermatologist will tell you differently, but it's how *he* defines a healthy glow.

While common sense should prevail (see sidebar), knowing your limit in the sun is a bit like knowing how many drinks it takes before things get ugly or potentially dangerous. Dr. Lipman's rule: Fair-skin types should stick to the 15-minute mark, scaling back if necessary. And everyone should slather on sunscreen after 30 minutes max. "As long as you're smart and know your limits, sunlight can be healthy, even euphoric," says Dr. Lipman, because it elevates our levels of the happy hormone, serotonin—which, in addition to regulating our sleep, helps control appetite, memory, energy, and attitude.

I can definitely vouch for the latter. After this year's long New York winter,

I went to Miami with a friend. My body had not seen a ray of sunshine for more than five months—a lifetime for an Aussie native. So I decided to test-drive Dr. Lipman's advice, lying out for 15 minutes early in the day, covering my face with SPF but letting the sun warm my body—it was bliss. During peak hours, I moved my lounge under a shady palm tree, following *both* the dermatologists' and Dr. Lipman's advice. (It also didn't hurt that it was closer to the tiki bar!) As I touched up with my SPF mist, I realized that I'd found my new happy medium...and that I'd never felt healthier. ■



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Kiehl's Activated Sun Protector Spray Lotion SPF 50, \$25, [kiehls.com](http://kiehls.com)