

Tanning in a Swimsuit May Lead to a Lawsuit

By Reg P. Wydeven
September 2, 2006

As I've mentioned in a previous article, my senior year of college, five buddies and I went to Panama City for Spring Break. Because I was the runner-up for the role of the albino monk in 'The Da Vinci Code', it's no secret that I don't tan well. Therefore, my buddy Tree and I thought it would be a good idea to go tanning to reduce our chances of getting burned in Florida. So we cut out a Batman symbol to put on our chests while we tanned and headed out to the shoe store at the mall that housed Eau Claire's only tanning bed.

After three or four twenty-minute sessions, you could start to see a difference - especially when Tree took his socks off and from the calf down he was snow white. Being 6'7" (hence the nickname "Tree"), his legs hung off the end of the tanning bed. He didn't find it nearly as amusing as we did.

To make a long story short, we had a great week, but I still got sunburned and I haven't been in a tanning bed since. However, because looking pasty like me is not desirable, tanning beds are more popular than ever.

In fact, experts believe indoor tanning has grown over the last two decades to a \$5 billion-a-year business. Coincidentally, the number of cases of melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer, in that same time frame has risen drastically as well. Teens used to get a little color before Spring Break or prom, but now many seek a year-round bronze.

Unfortunately, most of these teens believe indoor tanning is safe, while most doctors strongly disagree. The World Health Organization estimates that up to 60,000 deaths occur each year worldwide because of excessive UV exposure, and it accordingly urges youths age 18 and under to steer clear of indoor tanning.

This is easier said than done, however. In addition to peer pressure to look golden, some studies have shown that tanning can be addictive, a condition known as "ultraviolet light tanning dependent." Tanning releases endorphins, making it feel relaxing and which explains why frequent tanners experience withdrawal-like symptoms if they stop.

The Food and Drug Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Dermatology and the American Medical Association have all issued warnings regarding the dangers of tanning beds and sun lamps. In fact, the AAD and the AMA have even proposed banning the sale and use of tanning equipment for non-medical purposes.

Because of this, public-health officials and consumer advocates have taken a cue from the antismoking movement by pushing for raising taxes for tanning and passing laws preventing young people's access to tanning salons. Wisconsin passed one such law, banning tanning for anyone under 18.

In addition, a class action lawsuit for indoor-tanning consumer fraud was filed against New Jersey-based Hollywood Tanning Systems, which operates one of the largest tanning chains in the U.S. According to the suit, the company promotes UV lamps as a healthy alternative to outdoor tanning, likening a "safe" tan to a "safe" cigarette.

The tanning industry insists indoor tanning is safe, pointing out that dermatologists prescribe indoor tanning to treat conditions such as psoriasis.

If this lawsuit prevails, my lack of pigmentation may actually end up being cool.

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