

Why do sunbathers live longer than those who avoid the sun?

March 22 2016



Credit: Marina Shemesh/public domain

New research looks into the paradox that women who sunbathe are likely to live longer than those who avoid the sun, even though sunbathers are at an increased risk of developing skin cancer.

An analysis of information on 29,518 Swedish women who were followed for 20 years revealed that longer life expectancy among women

with active [sun exposure](#) habits was related to a decrease in heart disease and noncancer/non–heart disease deaths, causing the relative contribution of death due to cancer to increase.

Whether the positive effect of sun exposure demonstrated in this observational study is mediated by vitamin D, another mechanism related to UV radiation, or by unmeasured bias cannot be determined. Therefore, additional research is warranted.

"We found smokers in the highest sun exposure group were at a similar risk as non-smokers avoiding sun exposure, indicating avoidance of sun exposure to be a risk factor of the same magnitude as smoking," said Dr. Pelle Lindqvist, lead author of the *Journal of Internal Medicine* study. "Guidelines being too restrictive regarding sun exposure may do more harm than good for health."

More information: P. G. Lindqvist et al. Avoidance of sun exposure as a risk factor for major causes of death: a competing risk analysis of the Melanoma in Southern Sweden cohort, *Journal of Internal Medicine* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/joim.12496](https://doi.org/10.1111/joim.12496)

Provided by Wiley

Citation: Why do sunbathers live longer than those who avoid the sun? (2016, March 22)
retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2016-03-sunbathers-longer-sun.html>

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