

Health and beauty info sources may influence risky indoor tanning behaviors

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Young women who receive health and beauty information from their

friends and through social media may be more likely to ignore the risks of indoor tanning, according to a team of researchers.

In a study, researchers found a link between women who received health and beauty information from friends and beliefs that [indoor tanning](#) made them look and feel better. They also said that [young women](#) who relied on [social media](#) for health and beauty information also tended to reject the immediate risks of indoor tanning.

According to Jessica Myrick, associate professor of communications, Penn State, most young women are aware of the risks of indoor tanning, but tan anyway. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) has warned that exposure to UV radiation—whether from the sun or from artificial sources, such as the sunlamps used in tanning beds—increases the risk of developing skin cancer.

"We are really trying to find out why young women engage in this behavior when most are well-aware and knowledgeable about the link between indoor tanning and skin cancer, yet they persist," said Myrick. "We wanted to see if media use—particularly how young women use media to get information about beauty and how they talk to their friends and family about beauty and health—might influence those beliefs about the risks of indoor tanning."

The researchers, who report their findings in the current issue of the *Journal of American College Health*, said that when young women turned to their friends for health and beauty advice they were more likely to feel tanning made them look and feel better and, therefore, they were more likely to tan indoors.

When they went to their family for that information, however, the women were less likely to indoor tan. Family members may undermine the belief that tanning would make the women feel good, a strong pull

for indoor tanning, added Myrick, who worked with Seth M. Noar, professor of journalism, University of North Carolina; Jennah Sontag, [postdoctoral fellow](#) in [public health](#), Center for Tobacco Studies, Rutgers and Dannielle Kelley, cancer prevention fellow, National Cancer Institute.

"For a lot of people, if you think that indoor tanning will improve your mood—that it's a good way to lift your spirits and feel better—then you're more likely to tan indoors," said Myrick. "If they received information about health and beauty from their family, they were less likely to think that tanning is a good way to improve their mood and so, when you decrease that link between tanning and mood benefits, then you're less likely to tan."

Young women who received health and beauty information from [news sites](#), rather than through social media outlets, were more likely to understand that tanning could negatively affect their appearance and understood the immediate risks of indoor tanning.

Myrick suggests that the difference between social media and news sites as sources of health and beauty information may be related to how that information is filtered in those channels. News sites may offer more critical coverage of indoor tanning risks and be less susceptible to industry manipulation compared to the less editorially stringent social media outlets.

According to the researchers, knowing how messages on indoor tanning are reaching young women may help shape skin cancer prevention efforts. Skin cancer prevention organizations may want to insert stories about indoor tanning's link to skin cancer in young women into national media and amplify these messages using social media, they added. Young [women](#) should also be educated about [skin cancer](#) risks to help them both resist pressure from their peers to tan and to help spread more

helpful information to their own peers.

The researchers recruited 568 sorority members at a southeastern American university to complete an [online survey](#) about indoor tanning and health and beauty information sources. About 210 participants—or 37 percent—had tanned indoors. Of those 210 participants, 134—or 64 percent—had tanned in the past year. In addition to tanning experience, the survey also asked participants about where they received health and beauty information—the news media, social media, friends and family—and how they assessed the possible negative and positive outcomes of indoor [tanning](#).

More information: Jessica Gall Myrick et al, Connections between sources of health and beauty information and indoor tanning behavior among college women, *Journal of American College Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/07448481.2018.1536662](#)

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