I don't want to be white at Prom . . . it's like an addiction for me . . . my friends tease me and call it 'cancer in a box' . . . it is really convenient.

--comments from tanning girls

Wanna banish your pale, fair skin in favor of a deep, dark shade? Join the club. . . .

UV rays have the potential to damage your cells. By overexposing yourself to these rays, you're increasing your risk of skin cancer.

There are a few different types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and melanoma. Melanoma is the most dangerous and can spread to other parts of your body.

I have a dermatologist check out my skin twice a year. He doesn't like tanning. I blame my parents because they made me tan before we went on a cruise.

--Taylor Voycheske

The tan look may be favorable this time of year, but there are many downsides to laying on that bed of bulbs for your Prom experience.

For starters there are those nasty UV rays. Coming in two forms, UVA and UVB, both are hard hitters at making you tan. As they tan your skin, they are also causing you serious cell damage. Ouch.

UVA rays go much farther than the normal UVB rays. UVA ventures past the protective epidermis and shoot straight to the blood vessels and nerves. By damaging your immune system, they are making it harder to fight off diseases, including Melanoma.

"Of course, moles and things like that are kind of scary," said senior Brittny Dellford. Moles, freckles, or melanomas; which is the worse? Melanoma—more commonly known as skin cancer. Every time you step into that tanning bed, you are at a greater risk for developing cancer. In addition, cancer is also the second leading killer in the United States. Is that Prom tan worth being just another statistic?

Another downside to tanning beds is premature aging. Unprotected overexposure to tanning leads not to beauty, but aging. Yet again, harmful UV rays are to blame. By breaking down the collagen and elastic fibers in our healthy, young high school faces, tanning causes wrinkles and loose skin. Therefore, your quick fix to a golden tan will make you look older in the future. Picture yourself at your class reunion, looking 90 years old. How attractive!

Among it all, your tanning card can also leave you with eye damage and immune system suppression. And if you happen to get an STD in the near future, you will not be able to fight off or keep the virus under control. Two cheers for chlamydia outbreaks!

Thankfully, alternatives to baking yourself like a chicken pot pie exist. One option is going bronze without baking is with sunless self-tanners. They're called "tans in a bottle" contain dihydroxyacetone (DHA) that gradually stains the dead cells on your skin's outer layer. This "color factor" when exfoliated and lasts several days to a week.

Another alternative to tanning is using those spiffy moisturizers that contain a boost of bronze. At an easy $10 to $20, this fake tan lets you gradually build up a color without staining your skin. These moisturizing lotions speckle your dry skin and exclude the funny smell that most self-tanners imply.

I admit I am concerned because a 16-minute bed is equivalent to 16-20 hours of real sun time.

--Jen Kramer

Therefore, tanning girls, if you truly want to look like a chicken pot pie and have chlamydia outbreaks for the rest of your life, keep on tanning.

However, with alternatives on your side, you can get the glow of a tan while keeping your skin beautiful for years to come . . . not just for Prom.

Sources: http://www.fda.gov