Study links tanning to addiction

University of Texas research reports new perspective on soaking up the sunlight

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The line that divides getting tan and burnt, glowing and tanned, tan and just plain radioactive is a dangerous one that many young people dance on, especially during the hot days of summer. New research might have a few answers as to why so many crawl that golden line.

A new study conducted on beachgoers in Texas by the University of Texas in Galveston has marked the beginning of an investigation of a new outlook on the habit of tanning. When a person begins planning their hot day around tanning, doing so every day for hours at a time and is dependent upon the ritual of soaking up the sun, is it enough to call the habit addictive?

Brenda Higgins, director of the Skin Health Center, said she finds the basis of the study interesting. “I think it’s certainly an interesting thing,” Higgins said. “We know some people feel a need to be tanned. It’s a good question of how they reason this, understand this, and this may be like an addiction or perhaps just more of an obsession. But this certainly deserves more testing.”

The study surveyed 147 beachgoers ages 18 to 53 with questions similar to those posed to alcohol and drug addicts. The results showed a culture that was a lot more aware of the risks versus the benefits of a healthy amount of sunlight. But with the theories surrounding the subject more numerous and confusing, the results showed a culture that was a lot more aware of the risks versus the benefits of a healthy amount of sunlight.

Examples of the surveyed questions included: “Do you try to stay out as long as you can to get that golden glow?” “Do you ever feel guilty that you get a tan?” “Do you ever feel annoyed when people tell you not to get a tan?”

The questions were adapted from standardized substance-abuse surveys that had been modified for addicted sunbathers. The results showed the need to research people obsessed with signs of a “tanning addiction.” According to Higgins, another survey was then administered using the American Psychiatric Association’s standards for substance abuse, and the number jumped to 55 percent, according to the study.

The risks versus the benefits of UVB light are now usually thinning out. Most students are fully aware of the damage sunscreen can cause, as well as the benefits of a healthy amount of sunlight. But with the theories surrounding the subject more numerous and confusing, the results showed a culture that was a lot more aware of the risks versus the benefits of a healthy amount of sunlight.

Richard F. Wagner Jr., professor of dermatology at the University of Texas and an author of the study, wrote in the study that many “tanning addicts” were fully aware of their habit. “What’s interesting is the people that feel a need to get a tan,” Wagner said. “They know they’re addicted, understand this, and this may be like an addiction or perhaps just more of an obsession. But this certainly deserves more testing.”

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