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Common Questions about Sunless Tanning

What is the active ingredient in self tanning products?

The active ingredient is dihydroxyacetone (DHA).

When is the best time to apply self tanning products?

Plan to tan before bedtime, or when you can relax at home for several hours. Do not exercise or shower for six hours after application of the product.

How should I prepare my skin?

Shower using a gentle moisturizing cleanser, and exfoliate your skin using a slightly rough clean washcloth. Dry your skin completely. Do not use loofahs, or salt, sugar or oil containing scrubs. Do not apply deodorant, or makeup, or shave prior to application of the tanner. You should pre-moisturize certain areas such as hands, feet, knees, ankles and elbows.

What should I wear?

Wear tight-fitting, dark clothing such as a swim suit, underclothing or pair of shorts with T-shirt. Some people wear snug socks to protect feet, and vinyl or rubber gloves on the hands to prevent over-coloring. Hair should be tied off the face and neck, and light, bleached or gray hair should be covered.

Which products are best for first time self-tanning?

Mousses or lotions are easiest to apply if you are a beginner. Try a limited area first, such as your legs only, to determine if you are sensitive to these products. Aerosols can be used once you are experienced or desire an all-over tan. The use of alcohol-based aerosols will dry your skin out excessively; if you use these, alternate with lotions or mousses. Many "drug store" brands are as effective as more expensive "department store" products.

How can I apply these products to get the most realistic self tan?

Do not apply product directly to areas that do not usually tan much, such as underarms, wrists, ankles, feet or hands. Use a makeup sponge or damp washcloth to blend away tan lines if hand or foot covers are used. Excess color should be wiped off of knuckles and nails for example. Lotion can be applied as a final coat to hands and feet. Corn starch based, talc-free powders can be applied afterwards to areas that feel sticky.

How long will my sunless tan last, and when should I reapply?

Most sunless tans will darken over the first 24 hours; wait at least this long before another coat is applied. Most sunless tans will fade over seven days. Apply moisturizers daily and avoid bar soaps, scrubbing, and prolonged immersion in water to preserve your new tan. Tan extending lotions can help extend your tan also.

Do I have to wear sunscreen?

You must still wear sunscreen. The active ingredient in self-tanners does not protect against harmful UV radiation.