

Beyond the Pale

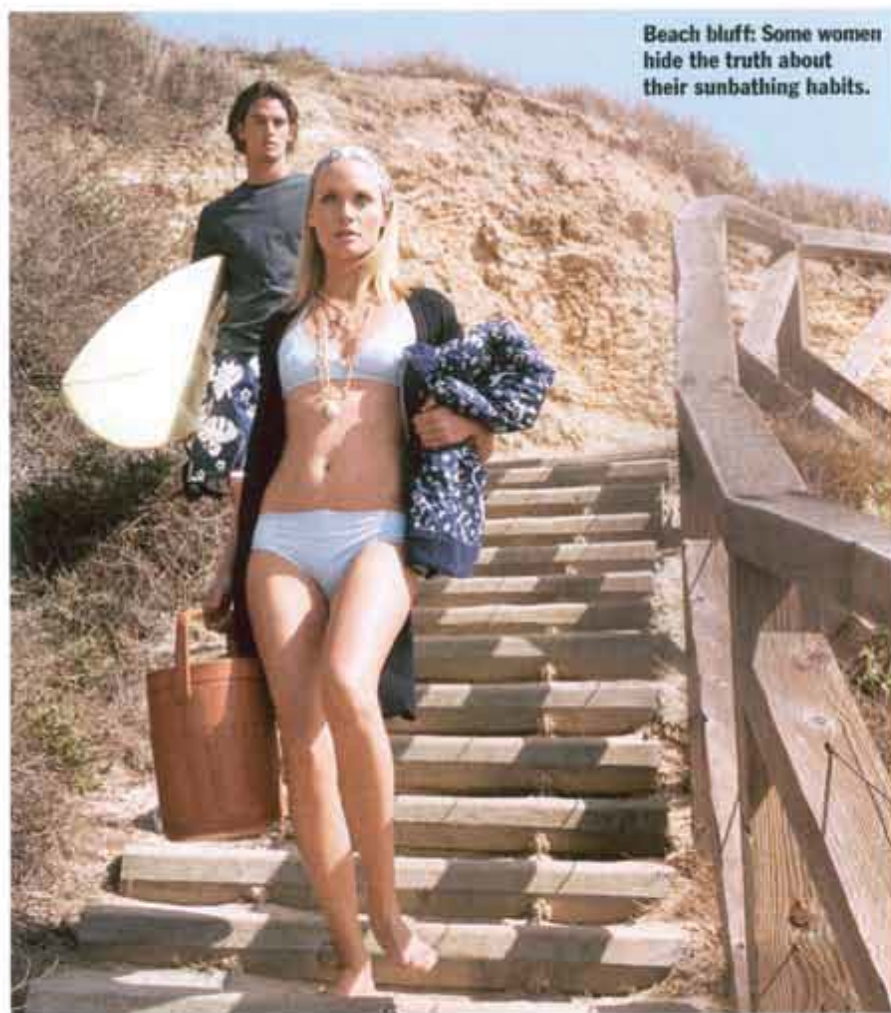
Soaking up rays can seem intoxicating—and that may explain why many otherwise health-conscious women keep getting tan. By Rory Evans

You probably know a summertime tanorexic. Maybe you are one yourself: The first day the mercury shimmies over 75, you're on the plaza outside your office at lunch, shucking away your cardigan, baring your arms, shutting your eyes to the warmth, absorbing sunshine like the statue you're leaning against. Maybe you wait for the weekend, though—and then make up for lost time, rigging up elaborate wind guards on the beach.

"When I lived in New York, I would strip down to my bikini in Central Park the second there was a glimpse of sun," says Katie, a 25-year-old now living in Washington, D.C. "On lunch breaks, I'd purposely walk on the sunny side of the street, then come back to the office and immediately check my tan lines. During college in South Carolina, I scheduled my classes around prime sun hours. Oh, and I also paid \$50 extra rent a month to live on the sunny side of the building, with a balcony," she says.

Deep down, of course—beneath those toasty melanin cells—Katie and her fellow summertime tanners know better: They're well aware that this isn't the healthiest habit, that a tan is a sign of damage, that those new freckles aren't "cute." Sunbathing is just the reward you give yourself for withstanding yet another punishing unflattering-puffer-coated winter and drizzling spring. "Women feel like it's OK to get sun for just a day or two, just on weekends," says Francesca J. Fusco, assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City. "In their heads, they're healthy ten months a year, so they think they can have their fun during the summer."

This seems especially true in colder climates. "Ever since I moved to L.A.,



Beach bluff: Some women hide the truth about their sunbathing habits.

I've realized people live in such fear of aging and skin cancer, with their big hats and daily SPF, to a degree that I never saw when I lived in New York," says Sally, 37, a television producer.

The undulating pattern of sunbathing in the summer, going back to being pale in the winter, and sunbathing again could burn people in more ways than one. "Studies have shown that getting an occasional blistering sunburn can be more dangerous than having a steady tan with regard to the risk of melanoma, the most dangerous kind of skin cancer," says Jody A. Levine, codirector of Plastic Surgery & Dermatology of NYC. But that's not a rationale for a permatan:

The risks of basal-cell and squamous-cell carcinoma "are linked to cumulative UVB radiation—the more exposure, the greater the risk." Although it has been reported in the *Harvard Health Letter* that the body tans as a form of protection against UV rays, dermatologists still insist that people use sunscreen. "A tan has an SPF of eight at best," Levine says. "That's not even close to the 30 or 45 we recommend."

Perhaps one reason it's hard to fathom giving up tanning is that all summer long, people tell you how great you look—when they're not asking you if you've lost weight. "The simple answer to why I still lay out, knowing what I know, boils