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I think what you are doing is phenomenal and much needed.

- Carol H.

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A Woman's Irk is Never Done: The Sunny Side of Cancer

by Kimberly Gadette

"Young lady, you're not going outside without a jacket! And where's your galoshes? You'll catch your death of cold!"

Nagging mothers—annoying, relentless, sometimes as smothering as a winter parka—usually have a point. But now that summer's here, Mom won't have to constantly remind her family about outdoor coverage, right?

Wrong. Same song, different lyrics: "Young lady, you're not going outside without your SPF 15! And where's your sunhat? You'll catch your death!"

Unlike galoshes and parkas, Mom might nag even more, since sunscreen isn't as easy to spot as a galosh. But in this case, catching one's death isn't an exaggeration. According to the American Cancer Society, one American dies of melanoma every 63 minutes.

Therefore, it's Summertime ... and the livin' is greasy. Especially with a thorough application of SPF 15.

"Sunscreen? No way!" howls Daughter, the teenaged beauty queen. (70% of tanning bed users are women between the ages of 16 and 49.) After all, she has an important summer event coming up, and she WILL be gorgeous. She flashes her killer smile, all the brighter because of her bronzing skin, and waves a complimentary coupon from her neighborhood indoor tanning salon—coupons that were distributed like Red Hots at her high school just weeks before the prom. "I'm off to the tanning salon. They say it's completely safe." But what they're not saying: UV rays emitted by tanning booths are so concentrated that 20 minutes of exposure is equal to more than three hours in the sun. Per the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, use of a tanning bed is now listed as a "known human carcinogen."

Thanks to Madison Avenue and the \$5 billion dollar sunless tanning industry, we've been burned by all the sunny lies promulgated by the Indoor Tanning Association ("ITA"). It seems that the stories that the ITA is dispensing have almost as many holes as the Earth's ozone layer, including this one: "Relatively brief exposure to tanning beds several times a week can help to ward off a host of debilitating/deadly diseases, including cancer."

Like Wilford Brimley hawking oatmeal, the ITA suggests that indoor tanning is the right thing to do. I'm not sure which is harder swallow.

In reaction to the current dangers, and the fact that only 26 states have minor regulations (Washington has no rules whatsoever), House Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) and Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL) have introduced the Tanning Accountability and Notification Act (the "TAN Act," H.R. 4767). This legislation would direct the FDA to re-examine the warning label on tanning beds in order to effectively communicate the risk of skin cancer. Senator Jack Reed (D-RI) plans to introduce the TAN Act in the Senate.

I applaud these efforts. But though an increased consciousness is great, the equivalent action of placing warning labels on cigarette packs haven't exactly stopped people from smoking themselves into ashes.

Back to those nagging moms—whether we protect our kids from nicotine, drugs or soaking up those rays of blight, it's up to us to impart a message of individual strength and self-reliance against the "live fast, die young, and leave a good lookin' corpse" credo that's been hanging around, like an insolent high school dropout, since its debut in a 1949 movie.

And while I'm examining earlier summers, in the 1930's, Coco Chanel proclaimed that tan skin was fashionable. Until that time, a woman's beauty was held to a whiter shade of pale. Maybe Ms. Chanel did it to celebrate her own name of "Coco," but thanks a lot for nothin', lady.

Sundry and diverse perceptions about suntanned glamour are almost as prevalent as Copernicus' favorite star itself. When cooked, we're supposedly more vibrant, thinner, sexier, hotter, hipper and my favorite, we've got a "healthy-looking glow." Like victims of nuclear fallout?

Here's another wrinkle: Aside from possibly fatal cancer, what does tanning do to our looks in the long run? How about skin that not only creases, but becomes weathered, lined and leathery in the blink of a lightyear? Skin that's so overrun with superficial blood vessels and blotches that we'd make W.C. Fields blush with pride. Wait, that's no blush, that's sun-induced rosacea. And even worse, weakened skin is only possible if we can outlive the altered DNA that destroys our immune system.

Sign me up for a roll on the tanning bed, please? I'm dying to look like Samsonite. Literally.

Yep, Summertime ... and the livin' is greasy. Nags or not, as the true stars of our families, it's up to us to instill this message to our loved ones: Greasy livin' sure beats the alternative.