

# Picking the Best Self Tanner

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These days, we all know the dangers of basking in the sun. But that doesn't mean we've given up on the perfect golden glow. So when tanning under the rays of the sun is off limits, many consumers turn to self-tanners to get the job done. But with tanning lotions, bronzers and tanning sprays on the market, getting the perfect sun-kissed look can get complicated and confusing. Not anymore. Check out our comprehensive guide to self-tanners for all the information you need on the best self tanner for you. Or, go directly to our [self tanner product recommendations](#) >>

First things first. When you take dangerous ultra violet rays out of the equation (these are the sun's harmful rays that cause natural tans, in addition to sunburn and skin cancer), what is doing the bronzing? Most sunless tanners use dihydroxyacetone. It's the only FDA-approved self-tanning agent, and works by causing a chemical reaction with the top layer of your skin, darkening it. According to Dr. Amy Derick, a board-certified dermatologist in Barrington, Illinois and media contact for the [Women's Dermatological Society](#), dihydroxyacetone is considered safe for the use of self-tanning. Keep in mind, though, that because your tan is caused by a chemical reaction, in order to maintain a certain level of glow, you need to continuously use your preferred tanning product or the color will fade.

So that's how sunless tanners work....but which one should you choose? These are the primary choices available.



Many professional salons offer airbrush tanning or spray tanning. When you get a spray tan, you're essentially receiving a heavy dose of the previously mentioned chemicals, which result in a quick reaction and a speedy tan.

Pros:

- Fast. One session will generally take less than 30 minutes.
- Effective. One session will usually leave you with a beachy looking tan that develops fully over the course of 3 days.
- Natural look. Since professionals apply this tan, you're more likely to avoid that orangey hue because your tan is specially designed for you.

Cons:

- Price. Expect to pay \$30 - \$80 for your professional spray tan.
- Inconvenience. After a spray tan, there are a whole host of activities to avoid.
  - Showering. You need to wait about 6 hours until you can shower.
  - Taking a hot bath. The warm water might cause your tan to fade so avoid warm baths.
  - Wearing light colored clothes. They could become ruined by your spray tan.
- Short duration. Your spray tan will look great for the first week but then will quickly start to fade.



## At Home Sunless Tanning

Not ready to commit to a professional spray tan? At home self tanners are another option to consider. At home self tanners come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

### ***At-home tanning spray:***

If you trust your aim, you might consider an at-home airbrush tan kit. Expect to spend \$30 - \$50.

- Pro: Immediate results similar to professional spray tans
- Con: It might be difficult to evenly distribute a spray yourself, so you run the risk of an uneven tan.

### ***Gradual tanning lotion:***

Several applications of gradual self-tanning lotion leave your skin looking noticeably tanner. Expect to spend \$5 - \$20.

- Pro: A natural glow will develop over the course of a few days, and the price is affordable.
- Con: Gradual tanning lotion takes typically 7-10 days to show results.

### ***Tanning gel:***

Similar to lotion, gels smooth on and deliver tanner skin. Expect to spend \$10 - \$40.

- Pro: Self-tanning gel dries quickly, won't leave skin feeling greasy and works within hours.
- Con: Some users like using self-tanners that also moisturize, and tanning gels do not provide moisturizing qualities.

### ***Tanning Mouse/Tanning Foam:***

Like gels and lotions, tanning mouse and tanning foams provide quick tanning results. Expect to spend \$15 - \$40.

- Pro: Tanning mouse and tanning foams work fast so you get a summery glow right away.
- Con: Foams and mouse are also prone to streaking and leaving an overly orange hue.

### ***Tanning Towels:***

Tanning towels have self tanner within a towelette that you smooth over your skin. Expect to spend \$20 - \$40.

- Pro: Most reviewers say tanning towels are no mess, no fuss and the tan really lasts.
- Con: Some reviews complain of uneven tans and streaks. <!--[endif]-->

### ***Bronzers:***

For a one-time tan, you can use bronzing lotion and make-up, which will wash off the next time you take a shower. These products just tint skin to provide a temporary glow. Expect to spend \$5 - \$50.

- Pro: If you're looking for a quick glow, these products deliver results without much commitment.
- Con: Bronzers typically wash off after one shower.

### ***Tanning pills:***

These pills contain canthaxanthin, which according to the FDA, "can turn the skin a range of colors from orange to brown. It can also cause serious health problems including liver damage; hives; and an eye disorder called canthaxanthin retinopathy, in which yellow deposits form in the retinas." Tanning pills are available for sale in the United States but **the FDA does not approve of the use of the active ingredient, canthaxanthin, for the use of self-tanning.**



## Tips for Getting Best Results

Here are some tips to ensure the best sunless tan coverage and application:

- Exfoliation. The first step directly prior to applying the self tanner is a good exfoliation. This way, your skin is clean and ready to be the perfect adherence surface for a long-lasting, natural-looking sunless tan.
- Apply everywhere. One of the most common mistakes with applying self tanner is that people do not remember to apply them everywhere, including not-so-obvious areas like behind your ears, the back of your neck and the backs of your hands. When you see someone with white areas like this, it looks fake.
- Strip down. The less clothing you have on after you apply self tanner to your body, the better able the DHA can work on giving you the self tan because it is activated by oxygen and will work better if it has more open air during the chemical activation phase. It is not generally recommended to reapply a second coat the same day. Waiting until the next day produces more natural looking results and lessens the chance of "yellowness" or an uneven color.
- Apply a barrier (such as petroleum jelly) to nails, elbows, and knees, which can get darker than other areas. Consider using gloves, since tanners can stain palms even if you wash right away.



## Safe Sunless Tanning

You get a round of applause if you've opted for a sunless tanner instead of baking under UV rays. But self tanners require certain safety precautions, too.

- Avoid ingesting any sunless tanner. The FDA has only approved DHA for external contact with the skin, so do not inhale fumes or expose the sunless tanner to any mucous membrane (like your lips, mouth or eyes.)
- Do a skin test first before applying a self tanner on your whole body. Wait to be sure that you don't suffer an allergic reaction.
- Keep using sunscreen! Just because you aren't tanning outside doesn't give you a free pass to forego sunscreen. Most self tanners don't include sun protection so you need to double up.



## The Best Self Tanning Products



Best Gradual Self Tanning Lotion: [Olay Touch of Sun Body Lotion Plus A Touch of Sunless Tanner](#) (\$10.00)

Reviewers say this product will indeed give you a glow in a week's time without any unpleasant odors.



Best Face Self Tanner: [Lancome Flash Bronzer](#) (\$26.99)

Reviewers often lament that their self-tanned bodies don't match the color of their face. But with Lancome's Flash Bronzer, the ghostly pale face look is no more.



*Best Self Tanning Gel:* [L'Oréal Sublime Bronze Self-Tanning Gelee](#) (\$8.99)

If you hate the oily feel of moisturizers, then consider trying a self tanning gel. Reviewers love the quick-dry feel of L'Oréal Sublime Self Tanning Gelee and say it works within a few days of use.



*Best No-Mess Tan:* [X Tend Tan Towels](#) (\$22.50)

If you want a tan and you want a tan NOW, then reviewers suggest the X Tend Tan Towels. Each towelette contains self tanner, which applies as you smooth the towel over your skin. Reviewers say it delivers a streak-free quick glow.