"Sunlight is Not Your Enemy"

Harvard Spotlights New Book Making the Science-Based Case for Sun Exposure



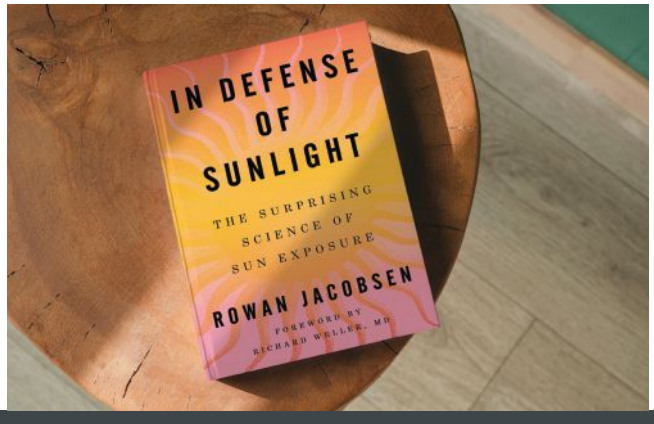
A NEW BOOK by award-winning science writer **Rowan Jacobsen** argues that decades of sun-avoidance messaging have gotten the risk-benefit equation backwards for most people—and the mainstream is paying attention. **"In Defense of Sunlight: The Surprising Science of Sun Exposure"** has drawn coverage and praise from outlets including Nature, which called it "a dazzling book," and The Wall Street Journal, which noted that "the sun-deprived among us would surely profit from Mr. Jacobsen's straightforward recommendations."

Among the most notable coverage: a July interview with the Harvard Gazette, in which Jacobsen discussed the research behind the book ahead of a Harvard Science Book Talks event at Harvard Book Store. His central point: small, daily amounts of sun exposure deliver health benefits that outweigh the risks for most people.

ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL MESSAGING FALLS SHORT

Jacobsen told the Gazette that public health recommendations on sun exposure were designed for the people most susceptible to skin cancer—those with very fair skin—on the assumption that universal sun avoidance couldn't hurt anyone. "When you look at the science," he said, "you realize those recommendations probably are harmful to people who are less sensitive to skin cancer."

He also puts skin cancer mortality in perspective: it isn't among the top 40 causes of death in the U.S. or worldwide, even though public messaging can make it feel like a leading killer. That doesn't make it trivial. Jacobsen is emphatic that sunburn is genuinely harmful and should always be avoided. The benefits, he stresses, come from moderate, non-burning sunlight exposure.



THE BENEFITS LIST KEEPS GROWING

According to Jacobsen, even modest sun exposure lowers blood pressure, reduces systemic inflammation, and triggers production of vitamin D along with a couple dozen other compounds made in the skin that appear to be anti-inflammatory, anti-carcinogenic, and rich in antioxidants. The result, he says, is significantly lower rates of the diseases that actually drive mortality: cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, and cancers other than skin cancer.

> "Studies have found that sun exposure reduces mortality (from any cause) by 10 to 30 percent," Jacobsen told the Gazette.

The mental health story is just as compelling. Sun exposure releases natural endorphins and opiates in the brain, relieving depression, reducing anxiety, and improving sleep by supporting circadian rhythm—what Jacobsen calls "a huge improvement in well-being."

WHY VITAMIN D PILLS DIDN'T DELIVER

Jacobsen's discussion of vitamin D supplementation will sound familiar to Smart Tan readers. People with naturally high vitamin D levels from sun exposure show lower rates of virtually every disease, but large clinical trials of vitamin D pills showed essentially no benefit except in people who were severely deficient. His explanation: sunlight on skin produces a couple dozen beneficial compounds, not just one. A pill delivers a single vitamin; the sun delivers the whole package.

Skin Type Matters

A MESSAGE THE INDUSTRY KNOWS WELL

Jacobsen emphasizes that recommendations must account for skin type. The very fair phenotype—light skin, light or reddish hair, freckles—carries elevated melanoma risk and warrants real caution. People with dark skin have almost no skin cancer risk and can reap sunlight's benefits with essentially no downside. For everyone in between, he says, "the benefits of sunlight clearly outweigh the risks" for all but the fairest-skinned.

His bottom line echoes what sun-care professionals have long advocated: replace sun fear and sun guilt with a smarter, moderate relationship with UV light. "Regular exposure to the sun should be part of the joy of everyday life," Jacobsen said.

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