

tanning accelerator

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Tanning Accelerator

Products claiming to make skin tan faster or darker under UV exposure. The claim is weakly supported at best, the products carry a **mandatory US warning**, and one branch of the category — oral tanning pills — has caused documented eye injury.

The mandatory warning

A suntanning preparation without a sunscreen must bear the warning at **21 CFR 740.19**:

Warning — This product does not contain a sunscreen and does not protect against sunburn. Repeated exposure of unprotected skin while tanning may increase the risk of skin aging, skin cancer, and other harmful effects to the skin even if you do not burn.

That warning is the regulator's own summary of the category, and nothing on this page improves on it.

The topical claims

Ingredient	Claim	Reality
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Tyrosine and tyrosine derivatives	Supplies the precursor for melanin synthesis	The most-cited and least-supported claim. Topical tyrosine is not shown to increase melanin production; melanin synthesis is not limited by substrate availability
Copper peptides	Cofactor for tyrosinase	No demonstrated tanning effect
Psoralens	Genuinely photosensitising	Dangerous. Used medically in PUVA therapy under supervision; they increase burning and carcinogenic risk
Riboflavin, melanin precursors	Various	Unsupported
Moisturisers	—	The one real effect. Hydrated skin tans more evenly and holds a tan longer, because dry skin sheds faster

Moisturising is the honest active in this category, and it is available from any body lotion.

Oral tanning pills — the serious harm

A distinct product class, and the reason this page carries a strong warning.

Canthaxanthin is a carotenoid approved in the US as a **colour additive for food** at limited levels. Sold as a "tanning pill" in high doses, it deposits in body fat and in the skin, producing an orange-brown colour — and it also deposits in the **retina**, causing **canthaxanthin retinopathy**: crystalline deposits in the macula, with reported effects on vision. Cases of **aplastic anaemia** and hepatitis have also been reported.

FDA has not approved canthaxanthin as a tanning agent, has warned consumers against tanning pills, and has taken import action against them. They are still sold online.

Pills containing beta-carotene or lycopene produce a mild carotenaemia — a yellow-orange tint — that is largely harmless and is not a tan.

What actually works

Nothing safe accelerates a UV tan. What produces the appearance without the damage is **dihydroxyacetone**: see [Self-Tanner](#), [Gradual Tanning Lotion](#) and [Tanning Water](#).

Melanin production is a response to DNA damage. A faster tan means faster damage, and that is the whole of the objection.

Where it sits in the rules

Cosmetic in the US — FDA primary category **(15) suntan preparations** — for a topical product, carrying the **21 CFR 740.19 warning** where no sunscreen is present. A product claiming to **increase melanin production** is arguably making a structure-or-function claim and therefore a **drug** claim under FD&C Act sec. 201(g).

Oral tanning pills are not cosmetics. They are unapproved drugs or adulterated supplements, and canthaxanthin has no approved use as a tanning agent.

In the EU, the **Common Criteria** under Regulation (EC) No 1223/2009 require cosmetic claims to be

supported by verifiable evidence, and psoralens are restricted in cosmetics.

Shelf life

12 months after opening for a lotion — an ordinary emulsion in a bottle that lives in a beach bag and is heat-cycled repeatedly.

Discard at separation, discoloration or an odour change. The more useful advice is that the shelf life is not the operative question: the product does not do what it says, and a moisturiser plus a self-tanner achieves the goal without either the warning or the risk.

Related

- [Sun and Tanning](#) — the shelf this sits on, and the rest of it.
- [Cosmetics](#) — what the label is legally allowed to say, and the full catalogue.
- The rest of *Tanning* — [Suntan Oil](#) · [Indoor Tanning Lotion](#).
- [Health and Wellness](#) · [The FDA Isn't That Great](#) — the medical and regulatory context.
- Regulatory statements here follow the FDA and EU sources listed on [Cosmetics](#), read 16 August 2026.