

How Bad Are UV Manicure Lights For You, Really?

You may want to rethink your gel manicure habit.

By Emma Norris - December 3, 2016

Image: Instagram @mpnails

I have a confession to make: I'm a gel manicure addict. It's a terrible habit that has made my once strong nails extremely brittle. I always tell myself I'm going to switch to **natural manicures**, but it never happens. I keep going back for gel because, let's face it, it's very efficient. It's extremely quick to dry, lasts much longer than normal polish and never chips. But while my weaker **nails** are a fair trade-off, I do have my concerns about the UV lamps they use to harden the gel. For a while I was able to turn a blind eye to all the headlines about the lamps giving you cancer. 'Apparently *everything* gives you cancer these days!' I scoffed to myself, admiring my flawless nails.

But a few months ago, I noticed a few new freckles had emerged on my hands. It was suspicious, considering it was the middle of winter and I'd barely seen the **sun!** I also noticed a very slight burning sensation whenever I slid my hands under the UV lamp. So, are the headlines correct? Am I religiously protecting myself from the sun, only to walk into a skin damage and cancer trap every time I hit the salon? According to dermatology experts: possibly, but there are ways around it.

Related: [The Scary Reason You NEED To Switch Over To An All-Natural Manicure](#)

What are the risks?

Image: iStock

Remember tanning beds? They're completely illegal in Australia now, but 10 years ago they were hugely popular. The reason they were outlawed was because they were found to increase customers' skin cancer risk by almost **60%** in just one session! Nail lamps use the same type of UV rays as tanning beds, but in smaller amounts. To put it into perspective, the level of UV radiation emitted from sun beds is up to **six times** stronger than the midday

sun. By comparison, the UV rays from nail lamps are around **four times** stronger but you're not using it for as long. A **recent study** showed that it would take around 12 visits to visits to a salon for DNA skin damage to be detectable. If you're a monthly gel manicure devotee like me, you could easily reach that in a year.

But even with this data, there's no definitive research yet to prove that UV lamps cause cancer. Think of it this way: spending a lot of time in the sun without protection won't guarantee you'll develop skin cancer, but it will definitely increase your risk. The same goes for regularly using nail lamps. And just like excessive sun exposure, there's also the cosmetic risk of **premature ageing**.

“ *The tops of the hands are a very cosmetically sensitive area, and we know that repeated exposure to UVA accelerates photoaging.*

Dermatologist and nail specialist Chris G. Adigun via SELF

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So, while gel manicures may leave your nails looking pretty, the skin on your hands might not be so attractive in a few years time! Ironic, right?

How to avoid it

Image: iStock

Don't worry, you don't have to completely give up gel manicures (phew!) With a bit of preparation, you can significantly decrease your exposure to UV from nail lamps. Before you hit the salon, slather a high SPF **sunscreen** all over your hands (front and back). Just take care to avoid the nail area, as the gel won't set properly if they're too greasy. You can also purchase **YouVee Shield** gloves, which have been proven to block 99% of the rays. They're fingerless gloves made out of a special polymer that has titanium dioxide, a component of many sunscreens, in it. They're one-size-fits-all and don't require washing (just a quick wipe). You can even wear them on your toes if you're having a gel pedicure! You can find more info **here**.

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A true believer in balance, Emma is just as passionate about pizza as she is about pull-ups. When she's not writing, she loves strength training, visiting new cafes and trying out new fitness classes. Having lived in Ireland and Canada, Emma was bitten by the travel bug at a young age. She loves nothing more than visiting new destinations and experiencing different cultures. Emma grew up (and currently lives) near the beautiful Coogee Beach and is happiest when she's near a body of water. She started her career in magazines and has recently made the exciting transition to the digital world.



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