



Skin Cancer

Dispelling Myths About Skin Cancer: A Colorblind Disease

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Myth: Individuals with darker skin aren't at risk for skin cancer.

Fact: While people with darker skin do not burn as easily or frequently as lighter skinned individuals, they are still not safe from harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun. People with darker skin are actually *more* likely to die from skin cancer than those with fairer skin.

With common misconceptions abounding, we set out to get some questions answered from expert dermatologist and Senior Attending, Georgetown-Washington Hospital Center Dermatology, Melanoma Center, Dr. Lynn McKinley-Grant.

Q1. Since the incidence of skin cancer is reported as lower in African American, Hispanic and Asian Pacific Islander populations, is it necessary to still check their skin regularly for signs of skin cancer?

A1. Yes. Most skin cancers are curable when caught and treated early. In fact, although the incidence rates are lower, survival rates are also lower due to a lack of awareness. Everyone should check their skin regularly. The melanin does protect somewhat but the reason more people die is because they are diagnosed later. This can be due to multiple reasons including socio-economic influences; late diagnosis from health care providers; and lack of education of the patients to recognize skin cancer in non sun exposed areas.

Q2. What is a common misconception about melanoma and other skin cancers in skin of color populations?

A2. One of the important facts to emphasize is that for African Americans melanoma more commonly occurs on non sun exposed areas. Early detection is the key to survival and self exams become very important. Education of health care providers to recognize skin cancers is also very important also to increase survival.

Q3. Is there a reason the survival rate for melanoma is low in skin of color populations?

A3. Cancer health disparities occur for a variety of different reasons. Scientists and researchers continue to examine causes for these disparities; however, great things can be achieved for improving survival rates with concentrated education and awareness efforts.

SSA is making strides in educating the public and dispelling myths about skin cancer in skin of color populations. Most notably SSA has partnered with the Black Entertainment Television Foundation (BETF) to promote sun safety and skin cancer prevention throughout their women health forums across the U.S.

Remember to check your birthday suit on your birthday. If you notice anything changing, growing, or bleeding on your skin, see a dermatologist. Skin cancer is very treatable when caught early.

Skin Cancer Affects everybody.

Protect yourself!

Source: http://www.sunsafetyalliance.org/news_spring2009#6