

Melanoma misconception: Dark skin tones at risk, too

May 12 2023, by Sonya Goins



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The myth that people with dark skin are immune to melanoma, a type of skin cancer, has persisted for many years. It's a dangerous misconception that has caused some people not to be diligent about protecting

themselves against dangerous UV rays.

Dr. Dawn Davis , a Mayo Clinic dermatologist, says people with darker skin tones need to be vigilant about sun protection.

"Melanin is the protein component of the skin that gives our [skin color](#)," says Dr. Davis.

Darker skin tones have more melanin. The pigment protects against sun damage and lowers the risk of [skin cancer](#). Some people with dark complexions think melanin shields them from getting cancer. But Dr. Davis says that's a myth.

"All patients, including [patients](#) who are skin of color, have a risk of melanoma. Children can also have melanoma," explains Dr. Davis.

When [melanoma](#) develops in people of color, it's often diagnosed at a later stage and is more aggressive. But that could be because skin cancer in people with darker skin may appear in unexposed areas.

"Under your armpits, in your genital area, under your nails, fingernails and toenails, and on the palms and soles," says Dr. Davis.

Dr. Davis says [people of color](#), including children, should wear sunscreen and perform regular skin self-exams.

How to reduce the risk of melanoma

The longer you're exposed to the sun, the greater the risk for developing skin cancer. Dr. Davis says there are several things people can do to protect their skin:

- Wear sunscreen of at least 30 SPF.

- Perform regular skin self-exams.
- See a health professional for abnormal growths or warts.
- Wear protective clothing.

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Citation: Melanoma misconception: Dark skin tones at risk, too (2023, May 12) retrieved 27 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-05-melanoma-misconception-dark-skin-tones.html>

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