Black Skin Can Crack If It's Not Protected From Sun Damage

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Now that summer's here, a lot of us can't wait to start enjoying the good weather and literally rejuvenate our bodies with the sun's power to generate vitamin D. But while you're soaking up the rays on the streets, beaches and backyard barbecues, don't forget this: Slather on the sunblock. African-American skin may be more protected from the sun's dangerous rays than most, but a recent article published in Ebony reminds us that our misperceptions about our skin could be putting us at risk for cancer.

Skin cancers, such as basal cell, squamous cell and melanoma, actually account for 1 to 2 percent of all cancers in the African-American community. What's more, the belief of some that we are impervious to the sun's damaging rays often leads to late diagnoses and increasingly fatal results caused by skin cancer.

Many black people believe that our risk of skin cancer and early aging is diminished thanks to high amounts of melanin, a pigment that gives color to the hair, eyes and skin and provides us with natural sun protection. But anyone, regardless of their skin color, can suffer a sunburn.

In addition, for those with darker skin it's often harder to tell when we've gotten too much sun. Multiple unknown burns can increase our risk of long-lasting damage that leads to skin cancer. (Think of Bob Marley: He died at age 36 from melanoma that was initially dismissed by doctors as a soccer injury.)

That said, doctors recognize that African Americans need to get enough sunlight too. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, almost one-third of black people are vitamin D deficient, and sunlight is the key ingredient our bodies need to produce this crucial vitamin.

The bad news is that low vitamin D is linked with increased rates of heart disease, depression, high blood pressure and even diabetes among African Americans. The problem is that as we start spending more time inside at work and as we slather on sunscreen when outside, we could actually be putting ourselves at risk at the other end of the sun spectrum.

But here's the good news: African Americans can protect themselves from skin cancer and adequately engage with the sun. Just check out the following tips:

To get enough vitamin D, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) suggests we indulge in 5 to 30 minutes of sun exposure two to three times each week without sunscreen.
Limit the time you spend in direct sun, especially between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. when the sun is strongest.
Perform regular skin checks with your doctor to spot changes in moles or ulcers.
Buy sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays. (UVA is linked to skin cancer and aging. UVB is linked to burns.)
Apply sunscreen, every day and throughout the year, and make sure the facial moisturizers you use contain sunscreen.

For more information about African Americans and skin health, click here.

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http://beta.docker.realhealthmag.com/article/AfricanAmerican-skin-cancer-24110-1896