Skin Cancer Is Color Blind

Why you should check yourself from head to toe

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Two persistent myths are that you get skin cancer only when you're overexposed to sunlight and that the disease doesn't occur in people with dark skin. When reggae icon Bob Marley died of acral lentiginous melanoma—a deadly type of skin cancer—that had developed under the nail of a big toe, it made folks think.

Although this cancer is rare, it's the most common form of melanoma that develops in people of color, including individuals of African ancestry, according to the Skin Cancer Foundation. This type of skin cancer appears on hairless areas of the body, such as the palms, soles of the feet and under toenails and fingernails.

But because other forms of skin cancer also occur among this demographic, dermatologists recommend that African Americans, Latinos and Asians—as well as white people—inspect every inch of their skin once each month for possible signs of cancer. This includes dark spots, growths or any changes in darker patches of skin; sores that won't heal or that return; sores that appear in a scar or on previously injured skin; patches of rough, dry skin; and dark lines under a fingernail or toenail.

In addition, doctors advise folks to examine the top and back of the head, bottom of the feet, lower legs, groin and buttocks.

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