

What Could Your Scary Symptoms Mean?

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Melanoma Risk with Fair Skin, Brown Eyes vs. Blue Eyes

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Find out if there's a difference in melanoma risk in someone with fair skin and brown eyes vs. fair skin and blue.

Lists of melanoma risk factors often include "fair/light skin and blue eyes." Sometimes, the list says, "blue or green eyes." Melanoma risk lists always name fair or light skin, or Northern European descent—which implies very light tone.

This all begs the question: Is melanoma risk higher in a person with light skin and blue eyes, when compared to an individual with light tone and brown eyes?

"I don't believe there was ever a statistical difference found (or even investigated) regarding the color of eyes in a person who is fair skinned, as related to their risk of developing melanoma," says Judith Hellman, MD, Associate Clinical Professor of Dermatology, Mt Sinai Hospital, NY, who has a private practice in Manhattan.

"It is clear that the lighter the color of a person's skin, the less protection it has against sun damage," continues Dr. Hellman. "A lighter color of hair and/or blue eyes probably just signal that the propensity of that person's body is to produce less melanin, which is what provides the dark color of the skin, and which is what protects the skin from UV radiation."

In other words, the more melanin in a person's skin, the darker the tone will be, and of course, the more likely they will have brown eyes. However, the color of brown may have nothing to do with the risk of this deadly cancer, and instead, brown is merely a marker for how much melanin a person's body produces.

Keep in mind that many light or fair people have brown eyes, including Asians and Northern Europeans. However, a person with dark pigment who has green eyes has a lower risk of melanoma (when basing risk on skin tone) than the Asian or Northern European with very light skin who has dark brown eyes.