

# Marriage Means 'I Do' for Skin Cancer Detection



WEDNESDAY, April 18, 2018 – A walk down the aisle may be a healthy step to better skin cancer detection.

New research shows that simply by being married, people increase their odds that a melanoma – the most deadly form of skin cancer – will be spotted early, when it's most treatable.

The reason? A husband or wife may help “by assisting in identification of pigmented lesions that may have otherwise gone unnoticed,” according to a team led by Cimarron Sharon, of the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia.

The finding could have implications for skin cancer prevention, the researchers said.

“Clinicians may, for instance, recommend that unmarried patients initiate regular skin examinations at an earlier age and continue them more frequently to detect lesions at an earlier stage,” the study authors reported.

One expert said that especially includes older men who've lost a spouse.

“It has long been observed that many widowers do not take care of themselves or seek screening exams, and more consideration should be given to these patients in the future to prevent fatal outcomes,” said Dr. Michele Green, a dermatologist at

Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City.

In the study, the Philadelphia researchers tracked data from more than 52,000 people in the United States who were diagnosed with a melanoma from 2010 through 2014.

Married patients were more likely to be diagnosed with early stage melanoma than those who were never married, divorced or widowed, the study found.

For example, while almost half (about 46 percent) of married patients presented with a very treatable, early stage melanoma lesion, that number fell to 43 percent for patients who'd never married, 39 percent for divorced patients, and 32 percent for widowed patients, the findings showed.

And the percentage of widowed patients whose melanoma was spotted at an advanced stage was triple that of married patients – just over 9 percent versus 3 percent, respectively.

Married patients were also more likely to follow skin cancer treatment guidelines and get a biopsy done after detection, compared to people who weren't married, the researchers said.

The study couldn't prove cause and effect, but Green believes the research "is very important, since it shows that having a partner – in this case a married spouse – can detect this deadly disease early before it metastasizes."

Dr. Victoria Sharon directs dermatology at Northwell Health in Great Neck, N.Y. She agreed that "a spouse may not only detect suspicious lesions on his or her partner, but may also provide encouragement to seek medical attention for such lesions. They may also provide more emotional, financial, and physical support for patients to follow through with [care]."

The study was published online April 18 in the journal *JAMA Dermatology*.

**More information**

The American Cancer Society has more on how to spot skin cancer.



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