

**Time for the Parkinson's Disease Patients to Break Out the Suntan Lotion:
Increased Risk of Melanoma in Parkinson's Disease**

What's Hot in Parkinson's Disease May 2009

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There is a growing body of evidence supporting the notion that melanoma may have a greater risk of occurring in the setting of Parkinson's disease. The latest study was presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 61st Annual meeting in Seattle, WA. A cohort of nearly 160,000 patients were followed carefully, and of those patients, 616 developed Parkinson's disease. A family history of melanoma roughly doubled the risk of developing Parkinson's. Melanoma has additionally been shown to be more common in Parkinson's disease patients. Gao and colleagues from the Harvard University School of Public Health speculated that there existed a common genetic link (e.g. pigmentation genes) between Parkinson's disease and melanoma, and this has been the subject of followup investigations.

There has always been a somewhat irrational fear among Parkinson's disease patients with a past history of melanoma, that taking levodopa will in some way reactivate an underlying tumor. Although there has been debate on this issue, no group has been able to conclusively confirm this fear, and in fact there has been much data to show that using dopaminergics/levodopa in

melanoma patients with Parkinson's disease is actually safe. Olsen and colleagues in a study from Denmark discovered that there was no effect of levodopa on the risk for malignant melanoma (odds ratio of 1.0 (95% confidence interval, 0.8-1.3) per 1,000 g cumulative intake of the drug). Constantinescu and colleagues in the Parkinson Study group confirmed the increased risk of melanoma in Parkinson's disease patients, but like Olsen found no relationship to levodopa treatment.

The apparent increased risk of melanoma in Parkinson's disease patients should be an important care aspect discussed between the physician and the patient. Malignant melanoma in Parkinson's disease is preventable by sun exposure and proper prophylactic creams or sprays, and early diagnosis. It is time for all Parkinson's disease patients to beware of the sun, break out the sun tan lotion, and schedule regular yearly evaluations with a dermatologist.

Selected References:

Gao, et. Al. American Academy of Neurology Abstracts from the 61st Annual Meeting in Seattle, WA.

Olsen JH, Tangerud K, Wermuth L, Frederiksen K, Friis S. Treatment with levodopa and risk for malignant melanoma. *Mov Disord.* 2007 Jul 15;22(9):1252-7.

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