



By: **Mridu Khullar Relph**

The human body has a complex early warning system. It sends signals every minute of the day telling us whether we are healthy and functioning well, or if there may be trouble brewing. These visual and sensory messages – a mild headache, nausea, a rash, fatigue, and countless others – come from all parts of the body, inside and out, from head to toe.

We tend to ignore the body's more subtle alerts, unless we are experiencing constant or severe pain. We assume that a slight discoloration or skin rash will sort itself out. Usually, that's exactly what happens. But by examining ourselves occasionally and looking for these messages, we may discover a health problem before it becomes a full-blown illness.

A word of caution from Dr. Linnea Chap of the Beverly Hills Cancer Center, however: "Although it's important to be aware of one's body, a woman should not become overridden with anxiety by looking for changes in her body every day."

Here are some simple tips for healthy self-checks that can be incorporated into your daily, weekly, and monthly routine.

### **Daily**

1. **Tongue:** Most people don't pay much attention their tongues, but it's an easy self-check that is recommended. "A change in the color coating of the tongue can often be explained by diet, but a persistent change could indicate a yeast infection or deficiency in the immune system," warns Dr. Chap. If you notice a white, yellow or orange coating, it can be a result of acid reflux, which can usually be treated effectively with over-the-counter antacids. If not, see your doctor for a more specific diagnosis and prescription.
2. **Eyes:** Unless you've been spending too many nights partying, those under-eye circles may the result of an allergy. If you have other allergies, this may be the cause of those raccoon eyes. Ask your doctor to perform a skin test to help pinpoint the allergen. If you notice a yellow tinge over the whites of your eyes, this can be an indication of a more serious condition. "This may be indicative of jaundice, which is a sign of possible liver disease," says Dr. Chap. Needless to say, you should see your doctor immediately.

Persistent, very dry eyes should also be reported to your doctor, Dr. Chap recommends. "It's most commonly a benign condition, but it can be a symptom of autoimmune disease, such as Sjogren's (recently diagnosed in Venus Williams)."

3. **Skin:** Have you noticed rough, dark patches of skin on your armpits, neck or groin? This could be a sign of diabetes. Excess insulin in your bloods can cause skin cells to multiply abnormally fast, leading to a buildup of tissue and melanin (a pigment). Consult with your doctor, who may recommend a blood test. (According to the American Diabetes Association 12.6 million, or 10.8% of all women aged 20 years or older have diabetes.)

While dry patches of skin are not uncommon, especially in drier climates, Dr. Chap advises caution. "Any change in the skin which doesn't resolve on its own warrants evaluation by a dermatologist who can assess whether or not a biopsy and/or medication is needed," says Dr. Chap. "Diagnoses are most often benign, such as psoriasis, but rarely, can represent more serious conditions."