

# The medical meaning of colors

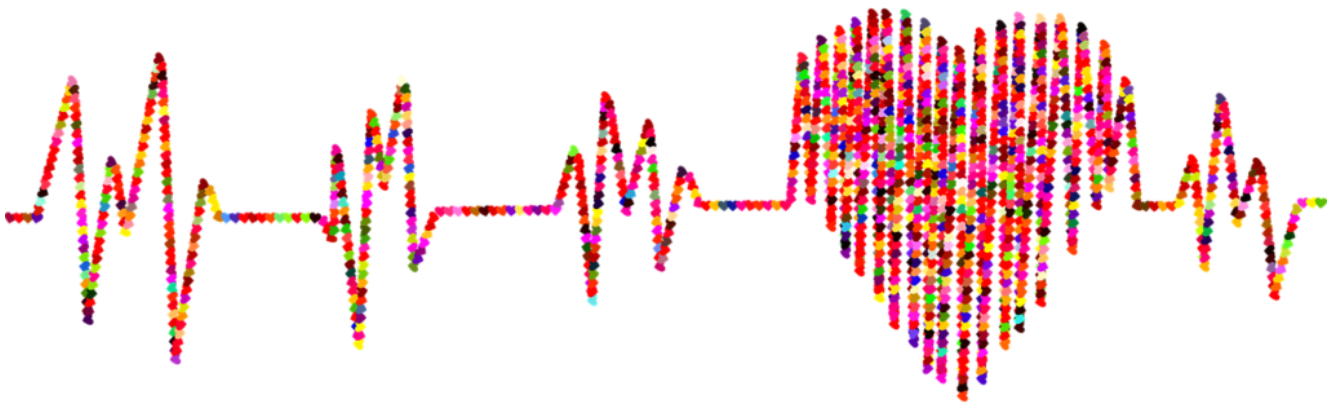


image by Pixabay

*“Red and yellow and pink and green, purple and orange and blue...”*

Please imagine the *“[I Can Sing a Rainbow](#)”* song playing in the background of this post as you *“listen with your eyes.”*

In the same order as the song, we proudly present colors with medical meaning:

**RED** It's okay to turn red while coughing. Red shows that a person has enough oxygen and is not short of breath. Of course redness of the skin is NOT a good color when it results from sunburn or infection. It is also not a good color in the whites of the eyes. Red eyes are irritated eyes, and red can be a sign of infection, allergies or sleep deprivation.

**YELLOW** In the “whites of the eyes” or sclera, yellow is a sign of jaundice. Jaundice in only the eyes of newborns is very common and usually does not require treatment. In

anyone older than a newborn, jaundice points towards liver disease. So yellow, other than in the newborn period, is a problem color.

**PINK** Children of all races and ethnicities should have pink inner eyelids, pink lips, and pink nails. Pink in these body areas implies normal blood flow and normal blood count.

**GREEN** We can see this color in a child's face before an episode of vomiting or fainting. If you see this color in your child's face, lie him down on his side to encourage blood flow to his head and to prevent him from hitting his head on the floor if he faints. And get a bucket!

**PURPLE** A bad rash called "purpura" is purple. It can be seen with a high fever or with leg and belly pain. If you see a purple rash on your ill child, take him to a doctor ASAP.

**ORANGE** Orange skin in an older baby WHOSE SCLERAE (EYES) ARE STILL WHITE may be seen in kids who love to eat orange fruit and veggies such as carrots, peaches and squash. This condition, called hypercarotinemia, is a result of the build-up of beta carotene from orange foods. We see this often in 9-12 month olds. Hypercarotinemia is not dangerous . An easy way to change the skin color is to feed more green veggies to balance out the orange ones.

**BLUE** In general, blue is not a good color. Turning blue while coughing means NOT enough air/oxygen is flowing to the body. Low oxygen levels in kids with heart or lung diseases cause a blue coloration in their faces, mouths, and fingernails.

**WHITE** White inner eyelids, lips, or fingertips implies anemia or poor blood flow in the body. However, white is a normal color for sclera, the "whites of the eyes."

Speaking of color— kids cannot get a tattoo legally in the USA under age 18 years without parental consent. In case you were thinking of letting your underage child permanently color his or her skin, read [this article](#) about an infection caused

by one kind of grey tattoo ink.

Hopefully you can now *“sing a rainbow too.”* If any of our medical colleagues are reading this post, please fill in any color we forgot!

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