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How melanomas avoid apoptosis

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Many cancers become resistant to chemotherapeutic drugs thanks to loss of the *p53* protein, which promotes cell cycle arrest and apoptosis in response to certain drugs. Metastatic melanomas are unusual in that, despite their chemoresistance, they retain functional *p53*. In the January 11 Nature, Soengas *et al*. find that these melanomas still lose the *p53* pathway thanks to deletion and methylation of the *p53* effector *Apaf-1* (*Nature* 2001, **409:**207-211). The *Apaf-1* locus shows over 40% loss of heterozygosity in melanomas, and in these cells the remaining *Apaf-1* gene is no longer expressed. Expression and chemoresistance can be reactivated by addition of either a methylation inhibitor or a functional *Apaf-1*gene.

References

1. Malignant melanoma: modern black plague and genetic black box.

2. *Nature*, [http://www.nature.com/nature/]