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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# How To Do a Monthly Skin Exam to Check for Melanoma

This information explains how to do a monthly skin exam to check for melanoma. You can do the exam by yourself or with the help of someone else.

## Melanoma

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer. It's easier to treat melanoma if it's found at an early stage. It's important to have regular skin exams with your healthcare provider to check for signs of melanoma.

You should also check your skin yourself once a month to look for new or changing skin spots or moles. This may help you find melanoma as early as possible.

## How to do your monthly skin exam

Follow these steps when checking your skin:

- Do your skin exam in a well-lit room so you can see any spots on your body.
- You can do your skin exam alone, but it may be a good idea to ask someone for help. They can check your scalp, back, and other areas that may be hard for you to see. Having someone help you with your skin exam may help you to better find melanoma.

Make it easy to remember to do your monthly exam. Mark days on your calendar for doing your skin exam. You can also add a reminder on you

# What to look for during your monthly skin exam

When checking your skin, look for spots that are:

- **Different:** A spot that is a different size, color, or shape than the other spots on your body.
- **Uneven:** A spot that has an uneven border (edge) shape, color, or texture. The ABCDEs of melanoma can help remind you of what to look for when checking for uneven spots:
  - **A - Asymmetry:** Spots don't look the same on all sides.
  - **B - Border:** The borders (outside edges) of the spot are uneven.
  - **C - Color:** The spot is more than 1 color.
  - **D - Diameter:** The length from 1 side of the spot to the other is more than 6 millimeters, or the size of a pencil eraser.
  - **E - Evolution:** The spot changes in size, shape, or color. Check for any new symptoms, such as bleeding, itching, or tenderness.



Please visit [www.mskcc.org/pe/melanoma](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/melanoma) to watch this video.

## How to check your skin

Follow these steps when doing your monthly skin exam:

1. Gather your supplies. You will need:
  - A full-length mirror.
  - A hand-held mirror.
  - A comb or hair dryer.
2. Start by checking your moles and birthmarks for any changes. Remember to look for the ABCDEs of melanoma. Look out for any sores that haven't healed.

3. Then, check your upper body. Look at your face, neck, and ears in the mirror.
4. Check your scalp. Use a comb or a hair dryer on a cool setting to move your hair so that you can see your skin better. You can ask someone to help you with this.
5. Look closely at your fingernails, palms of your hands, forearms, and upper arms.
6. Look at the front and back of your body in the full-length mirror. Use the hand mirror to get a closer look at spots or to help you check the back of your body. Lift your breasts to check the skin underneath.
7. Raise your arms and look at your left and right sides, and underarm areas.
8. Check the back, front, and sides of your legs.
9. Look in between your buttocks and around your genital area.
10. Sit down and look closely at your feet. Look at your toenails, the space between your toes, and the soles of your feet.

Call your healthcare provider if you have any questions.

## What to do if you find any new or changing skin spots

If you find any new or changing skin spots, take a photo. Then, call your healthcare provider. It may not be melanoma, but your healthcare provider will let you know if you should see them sooner than your regularly scheduled appointment.

For more tips on how to take a photo of your skin or spot, read. For more tips on how to take a photo of your skin or spot, read our resource *How to Take Pictures of Your Skin for Your Healthcare Provider* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/pictures-skin](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/pictures-skin)), *How to Take Pictures of Your Scalp for Your Healthcare Provider* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/pictures\\_scalp](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/pictures_scalp)), *Tips for Taking Pictures to Share with Your Healthcare Provider* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/tips-taking-pictures](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/tips-taking-pictures)).

You can send your photo to your MSK dermatologist using your MSK MyChart

account. MSK MyChart is our patient portal. If you don't have an MSK MyChart account, visit [mskmychart.mskcc.org](https://mskmychart.mskcc.org) or call 646-227-2593 to sign up. For more information, talk with someone in your healthcare provider's office.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](https://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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