Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

How To Do a Monthly Skin Exam To Check for Melanoma Using Your Photo Kit

This information explains how to do a monthly skin exam to check for melanoma using your photo kit. You can do the exam yourself or with the help of a spouse, partner, family member, or friend.

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 dermatologist (skin doctor) 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.

One way to do a monthly skin exam is with the help of a photo kit. The photo kit includes photos (printed photos or digital images) of your entire skin surface. These are sometimes called "total body photographs."

How to do your monthly skin exam

Follow these guidelines when checking your skin:

- Do your skin exam in a well-lit room so you can see any spots on your body.
- Use your photo kit to check your skin for new or changing skin spots.
- You can do your skin exam alone, but it may be a good idea to ask someone to check your scalp, back, and other areas that may be hard for you to see.
- 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 your smartphone.

Using your photo kit to do your monthly skin exam

Your photo kit includes a book of printed photos or a flash drive with digital images.

Book of printed photos

If you have printed photos, your kit will include a wax pencil to circle new or changing skin spots. When using your wax pencil, write on the plastic cover with the photo inside. Don't write on the photo itself. The markings on the plastic cover can be removed with a tissue.

Flash drive

If you have a flash drive, you will get your PIN number at your photography appointment. You will need to use this PIN number to unlock the flash drive before starting.

If you forget your PIN number, call your Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK) doctor or 646-888-6339 to speak with the Senior Medical Photographer.

Instructions for using your photo kit with flash drive

1. Press the "unlock" button on the top of your flash drive. Once you press it, the button will turn red. This means that the flash drive is on, but locked.
2. Use the keypad on the flash drive to enter your PIN number, then press the "unlock" button again.
    - If the unlock button turns green, the PIN number worked and you can use your photo kit.
    - If the unlock button turns red, the PIN number is incorrect and you will have to try again.
    - If you need help, call your MSK doctor or 646-888-6339 to speak with

the Senior Medical Photographer

3. Within 30 seconds of unlocking your flash drive, put the flash drive into a USB port on your computer. After 30 seconds, the flash drive will lock.
4. An icon will show up on your computer's desktop. Double-click on this icon.
5. Double-click on the icon labeled "**DermX Viewer"** to open your body map viewer.
6. Click on the "continue" button on the welcome screen.

If you have any questions, review the instruction booklet that your kit came with. You may also call your MSK doctor or 646-888-6339 to speak with the Senior Medical Photographer.

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 ABCDs of melanoma can help remind you of what to look for when checking for uneven spots:
  - A - Asymmetry: Half the spot doesn't look like the other half.
  - B - Border: The borders of the spot are uneven.
  - C - Color: The spot is more than 1 color.
  - D - Diameter: The spot is bigger than ¼ inch (6 millimeters), which is about the size of a pencil eraser.
- **Changing:** A spot that has changed. This includes a change in the size, shape, texture, color, or surface (such as bleeding). Check for any new symptoms, such as itching or tenderness.

Watch the video below for more information about melanoma and the signs to look out for when checking your skin.

Please visit www.mskcc.org/pe/melanoma to watch this video.

How to check your skin

Follow these steps when doing your monthly skin exam:

When examining each part of your body, compare it to the photos in your photo kit. If you notice any concerning spots, mark their location in your body map or book of printed photos.

1. Gather your supplies. In addition to your photo kit, you may want to have the following supplies to do your skin exam:
    - Full-length mirror
    - Hand-held mirror
    - Comb or hair dryer
    - A magnifying glass so you can look at your skin more closely
    - Your body map
    - Pen or pencil to fill in your body map and table
2. Start by checking your moles and birthmarks for any changes. Remember to look for the ABCDs 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, mark where they are on the body map, located in this section, or take a photo. Then, call your dermatologist. It may not be melanoma, but your dermatologist will let you know if you should see them sooner than your regularly scheduled appointment.

Take a photo

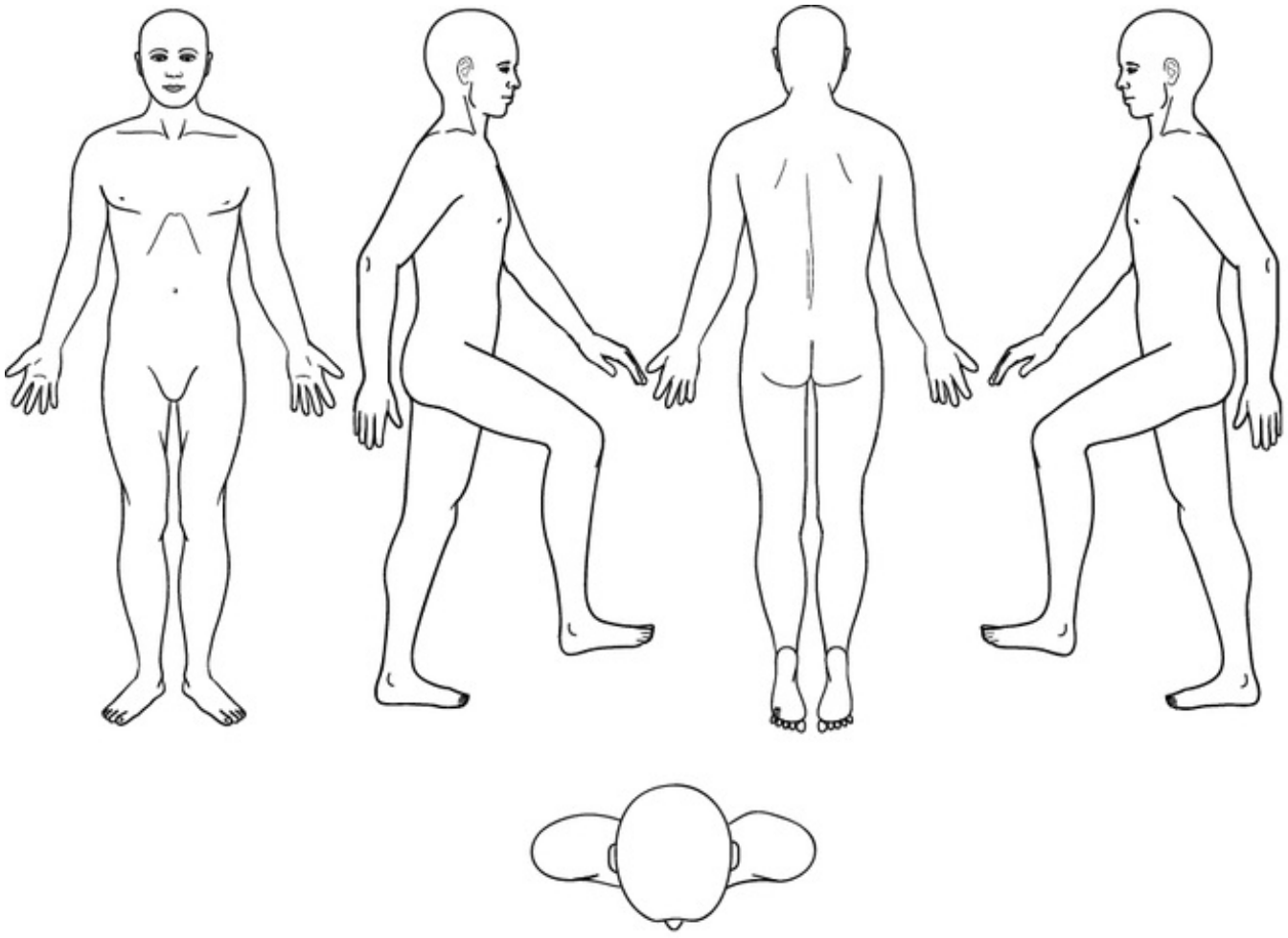
If there is a spot that you're concerned about, you can take a photo of it to show your dermatologist. For more tips on how to take a photo of your skin or spot, read our resource *How to Take Pictures of Your Skin for Your Healthcare Provider* (www.mskcc.org/pe/pictures-skin) and *How to Take Pictures of Your Scalp for Your Healthcare Provider* (www.mskcc.org/pe/pictures_scalp) .

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 or call 646-227-2593 to sign up. For more information, talk with someone in your dermatologist's office.

Mark it on your body map

If there is a spot that you're concerned about, mark its location on your body map. Use the table to record the date you saw it, its size (such as size of a pencil eraser), and what it looks like (such as dark brown and rough).

Bring your body map and table with you to your next dermatology appointment.



Date	Size	Characteristics

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

How To Do a Monthly Skin Exam To Check for Melanoma Using Your Photo Kit - Last updated on January 31, 2025
All rights owned and reserved by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center