Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

What You Can Do To Prevent Skin Cancer

Know Your Risk for Skin Cancer

The main risk factors for skin cancer are spending time in the sun (sun exposure) and your age. By spending time in the sun, you are exposed to ultraviolet (UV) rays. You're also exposed to UV rays when you use a tanning bed. Your risk for skin cancer is higher as you get older.

Getting 5 or more sunburns in your life doubles your risk of getting melanoma.

Other Risk Factors for Skin Cancer

- Fair skin.
- Personal or family history of skin cancer.
- Having moles.

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that develops most often in fair skin. That may explain the common belief that people with dark or black skin are at low or no risk for melanoma. In people with dark or black skin, melanoma is often diagnosed at a late stage. Some melanomas are easy to miss.

Melanoma on dark skin is not related to sun exposure. It can start in places that get little sun. That includes the palms of your hands, soles of your feet, nails, and inside your mouth, anal, and genital areas. When melanoma is diagnosed at a later stage, it's harder to treat. Learn more about melanoma in dark or black

skin.

Fewer people are dying from melanoma because we have better treatments, including targeted therapies and immunotherapy.

Know the Symptoms of Skin Cancer

Knowing your skin will help you to notice any changes and new moles or spots that may appear. Use the letters ABCDE to check moles and spots on your skin.

The ABCDE of Skin Cancer



ASYMMETRY. Spots don't look the same on all sides.



BORDER. The borders (outside edges) of the spot are uneven.



COLOR. The spot is more than 1 color.



DIAMETER. The length from 1 side of the spot to the other is more than 6 millimeters, or the size of a pencil eraser.



EVOLUTION. The spot changes in size, shape, or color.

If you find moles or spots that are changing, bleeding, or itching, make an appointment with a dermatologist (skin doctor).

1 in 5 Americans will likely get skin cancer.

Improve Your Skin Health

Get to Know Your Skin

Check your skin yourself once a month to look for new or changing skin spots or moles. This may help you find problem spots early, or find cancer early, when it's easier to treat. Checking your own body for skin cancer is called a skin self-exam. Here are some tips for checking your skin:

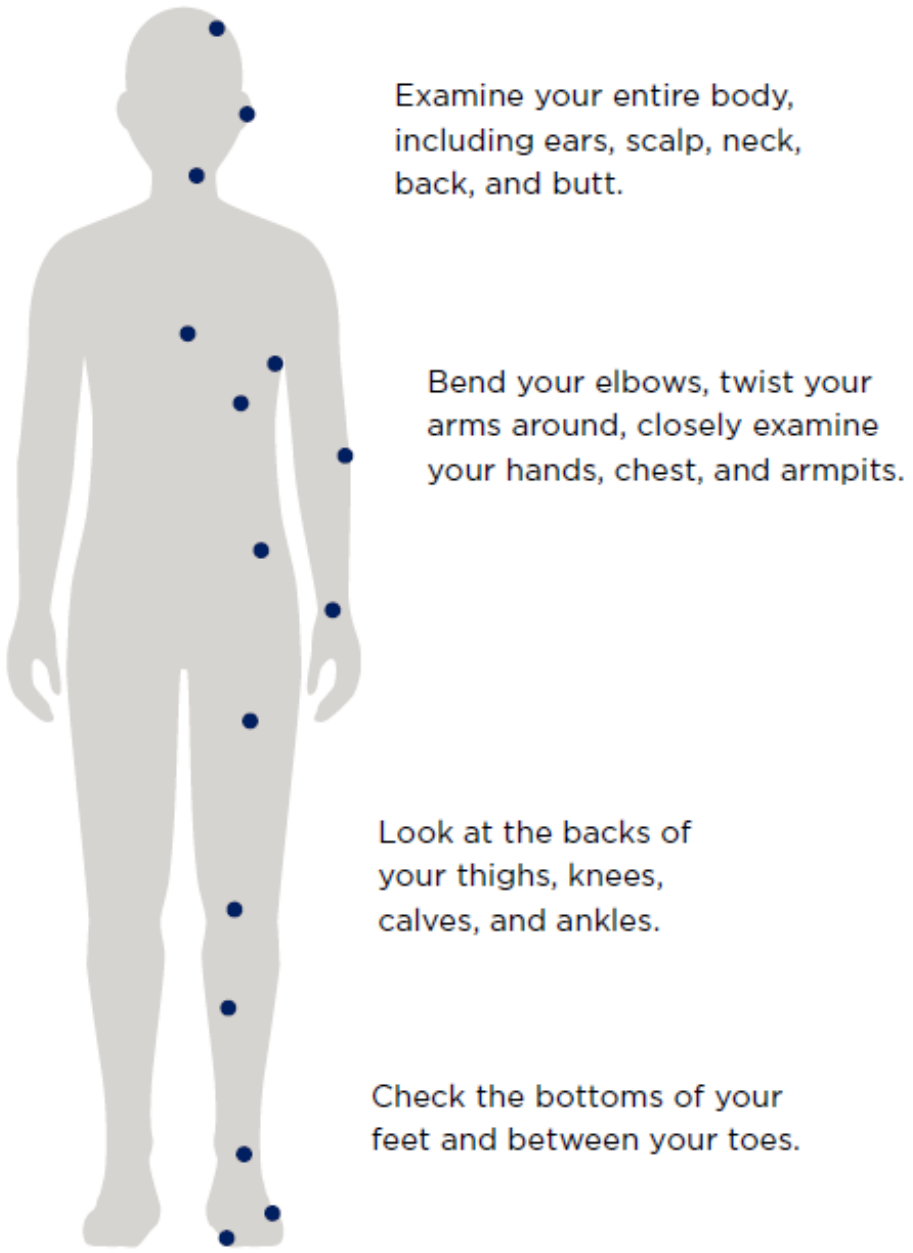


Figure 1. Tips for checking your skin.

Be Safe in the Sun

The best way to protect yourself from skin cancer is to avoid ultraviolet (UV) light from the sun's rays. We recommend you:

- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeve shirts, wide-brimmed hats, and sunglasses.
- Protect yourself from sun rays by wearing broad-spectrum sunscreen. Broad spectrum means it blocks both types of UV rays (UVA and UVB).

- Apply sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher 30 minutes before going outside. Do this even on cloudy days and in the winter.
- Apply a thick layer, about 2 tablespoons, on your face and body.
- Reapply sunscreen every 2 hours and after swimming, using a towel, or sweating.
- Stay out of the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when rays are the strongest.
- Get into the shade whenever possible.
- Do not use indoor tanning machines.

Melanoma can spread to other parts of your body if it's not treated early.

Compare Chemical and Mineral Sunscreens

There are 2 types of sunscreens, and they work in different ways.

- **Chemical Sunscreens:**
  - Work by absorbing UV rays.
  - Are usually easier to spread on your skin and include water-resistant options.
  - Common active ingredients include octinoxate, oxybenzone, and avobenzone.
- **Mineral Sunscreens:**
  - Work by creating a barrier on top of the skin to protect it from UV rays.
  - May not absorb easily into the skin.
  - Are a better choice for people with sensitive skin.
  - Contain zinc or titanium dioxide.

Actions You Can Take Today

- Learn about skin cancer risk factors.
- Protect yourself from UV rays from the sun and don’t use tanning beds.
- Get to know how your skin looks and feels. Getting familiar with your skin can help you notice changes.
- Talk with your healthcare provider about any unusual spots, moles, or changes in your skin.

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

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