

Self-Skin Exam

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer affecting millions of people world-wide each year. Skin cancer can be deadly but when detected early, it can be treated successfully. Performing a head to toe skin self-examination is an important preventative measure used to identify skin cancer before it becomes life threatening. A skin self-exam only takes about 10 minutes to complete and should be done once a month. Ask a family member or close friend to help you perform your skin exam and this will help you identify suspicious patches of skin in areas that are hard to see or reach. In addition to monthly self-exams it is recommended that you see your physician once a year for a professional skin exam.

This animation will explain how to perform a skin self-exam and how to detect possible signs of skin cancer and how to report the findings to your provider. The purpose of your skin self-exam is to identify any patches of skin that may be indicative to skin cancer. Skin cancer reveals itself in various ways depending on the type of skin cancer the person has.

The Most Common Forms of Skin Cancer:

Basal Cell Carcinoma (BCC), Squamous Cell Carcinoma (SCC) and Melanoma

BCC and **SCC** typically occur on areas of skin that are most often exposed to sunlight, including the face, ears, scalp, neck, arms, hands and legs. BCC often emerges as an open sore that will not heal or as a pearly abnormal growth. SCC can appear as a thick wart like sore or as a scaly red patch with irregular borders.

Melanoma often surfaces as an irregularly shaped or multi colored mole on the head, neck, lower legs, or trunk a practical system used to remember what to look for during the skin self-exam. Known as the "ABCDE's" of Melanoma, has been created to help you recognize the indicators of Melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer. If you notice an abnormal growth displaying any suspicious characteristics, record your findings and notify your physician. The ABCDE's of Melanoma stand for: asymmetry, border irregularities, color variation, diameter and evolving.

Asymmetry- one half of the mole is different from the other half

Border- the edges of the mole are irregular or poorly defined

Color variation- the mole is multi colored

Diameter- greater than a quarter inch or 6 mm in size.

Evolving- the mole looks different from other moles and has changed in size, shape, or color from its original state.

Performing a Self-Skin Exam

Look for any abnormal growths by first inspecting your hands. To include tops of hands, fingernails, palms of hands, and in between your fingers. Next stand in front of a full length mirror and examine your face and ears. Part your hair to insure you can clearly see your scalp, continue by inspecting your neck, chest and torso. Women should check under their breasts as well. Lift arms and examine under arms, elbows and front and back sides of arms. Proceed by turning your back toward the full length mirror and use a small hand held mirror to inspect your neck, shoulders, back, buttocks and back of your legs. To complete the exam, sit in a chair and examine your genitals, front side of your legs and feet. While examining your feet, include the top, soles, toenails and in between each of your toes.

Performing a skin self-exam once a month can help you detect skin cancer in its early stages. Increasing the chances for it to be treated before it becomes life threatening. If you notice any suspect moles or abnormal growths, don't hesitate to schedule a professional skin examination with your physician or a dermatologist. Another good idea is to take monthly notes during your self-skin exams to help you track your findings and also track any changes or irregularities in your skin. Take note of the location, size, color, shape and any other additional specifics about the moles or abnormal growths you detect. Saving the records and bringing them with you to your annual professional skin examination will help you accurately report your findings.