

# Know Thyself: Monitoring Your Skin

Be watchful for suspicious changes or moles

► Patient Handout



**ACCORDING TO THE** American Academy of Dermatology (AAD), 1 in 5 United States residents will develop skin cancer in his or her lifetime. That could be someone in your immediate family or one of your closest friends.

Fortunately, most skin cancers are curable if detected and treated early. The easiest way to identify skin cancer is to regularly monitor your skin (and that of your partner, children, elderly parents, etc.) and be aware of new or changing moles, freckles or marks.

Prevention, of course, is the best medicine, and although you've heard it before, it bears repeating again and again: Wear sunscreen and protective clothing and avoid tanning booths and excessive time in direct sunlight.

An abundance of research shows that exposure to ultraviolet light is the most preventable risk factor for skin cancers.

## Self-Exam Tips

To examine your skin, stand in front of a mirror and examine yourself front, back, left and right, with your arms raised. Next, look carefully at your forearms, back of upper arms and palms. Examine the backs of your legs and feet, the soles of your feet and the spaces between your toes. Use a hand mirror to check the back of your neck and scalp, and finally your back and buttocks. A thorough examination is easier with help, so consider having your partner or a friend examine hard-to-reach places like between your shoulder blades.

A monthly assessment is a good starting point, but ask your primary care provider or dermatology provider how often you should perform a self-exam and how often you should plan to have a professional assess your spots.

## Know What You're Assessing

And what, exactly, are you looking for in these examinations? The AAD wants you to know your ABCDEs and to visit your primary care or dermatology provider right away if your mole or spot exhibits:

**Assymetry:** The mole is misshapen or irregular.

**Border:** The border of the mark is poorly defined or uneven.

**Color:** There are variations in color from one part of the mole to another; there may be shades of tan, brown and black, or even white, blue or red.

**Diameter:** Most melanomas are more

than 6 millimeters when diagnosed, but they can be smaller.

**Evolving:** The mark looks different from the rest of your moles, or it is changing in size, shape or color.

## Skin Cancer Stats & Facts

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer, and basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas are the most common forms. Melanoma incidence rates have been increasing for the past 30 years. It is the most common form of cancer for people 25 to 29 years old and the second most common form in people 15 to 29 years old. White people and men older than 50 are at higher risk for developing melanoma than the general population. People with more than 50 moles, atypical moles, light skin or eyes, freckles, a history of sunburn, or a family history of melanoma are at an increased risk for developing melanoma.

Compared to the general population, melanoma survivors have an approximately nine-fold increased risk of developing another melanoma. So, if you have been diagnosed with melanoma, it is especially important to talk about the frequency of self-exams and professional visits with your dermatology specialist.

## Resource

Visit the American Academy of Dermatology website at [www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org) for a downloadable Body Mole Map to help you monitor skin changes. ■

NOTES:

View and print this and other patient handouts on our website, [www.advancweb.com/NPPA](http://www.advancweb.com/NPPA). All handouts are posted in English and Spanish.

advance for  
**NPs&PAs**