



Checking your body for skin cancer

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the U.S., but if it's found early, it's easier to treat. That's why regular skin exams are important. You can do a self-exam each month to see if your skin has changed. Then, follow that up with a yearly exam by your doctor.

How to do a skin self-exam

It's best to do a skin self-exam in a well-lit room after you take a shower or bath. You will need a full-length mirror and a handheld mirror. It might be helpful to have a friend or family member check places you can't see well, like your scalp.

- Stand undressed in front of a full-length mirror and look at the front and back of your body.
- Raise your arms and check your left and right sides.
- Examine your back, buttocks and genitals using a handheld mirror.



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- Thoroughly check the less obvious parts of your body including:
 - The tops and bottoms of your feet, as well as between your toes and even your toenails
 - The backs of your hands, plus your palms and fingernails and all around your fingers
 - Your neck
 - Your ears
 - The backs of your legs
 - The undersides of your arms
 - Your face
 - Your lips
 - Your scalp

What to look for

The first time you examine your body you'll learn where your birthmarks, moles and other marks are located and how they look and feel. After that, when you do your monthly checks, see if any new moles have appeared. Also, follow the National Cancer Institute's "ABCDEs" when checking the moles you already have on your skin.

A is for asymmetry. Both halves of a noncancerous mole should be the same.

B is for border. The edges of a noncancerous mole should be smooth, not ragged or blurry.

C is for color. Uneven color is a concern.

D is for diameter. If a mole changes size (especially if it gets bigger), talk to your doctor.

E is for evolving. If the mole changes in any other way, talk to your doctor as well.

If you notice any unusual or suspicious changes to your skin, make an appointment to see your doctor right away.



Sources:
National Cancer Institute website: *What You Need to Know about Melanoma and Other Skin Cancers* (accessed February 2013): cancer.gov.
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *Skin Cancer* (accessed February 2013): cdc.gov.
American Cancer Society website: *Skin Cancer Prevention and Early Detection* (accessed February 2013): cancer.org.

This information is meant to be educational. It should not be interpreted as medical advice. Please talk to your doctor about changes that may affect your health.

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