



# May is National Melanoma/Skin Cancer Detection & Prevention



- \* **Melanoma - American Academy of Dermatology - Monday, May 2**
- \* **National Woman's Health Week - May 8 - 14**

## *Skin cancer is the most common of all cancer types.*

There are more than one million skin cancers (melanoma and non-melanoma) diagnosed each year in the United States. That's more than prostate, breast, lung, colon, uterus, ovaries, and pancreas cancer combined.

And the number of skin cancers has been on the rise steadily for the past 30 years. The good news is that there is a lot you can do to protect yourself and your family from skin cancer. Most skin cancers are caused by too much exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays, but some may come from artificial sources, such as tanning beds. In an ideal world, skin cancer could be prevented. But many people spent too much time in the sun before they learned how dangerous it could be. The next best opportunity is to find skin cancer as early as possible. Finding possible cancers of skin doesn't require any x-rays or blood tests - just your eyes and a mirror. ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org))

## *Sun Safety Resources*

- \* American Academy of Dermatology ([www.aad.org](http://www.aad.org))
- \* Environmental Protection Association ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov))
- \* Centers For Disease Control and Prevention ([www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov))
- \* National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention ([www.skincancerprevention.org](http://www.skincancerprevention.org))
- \* Skin Cancer Foundation ([www.skincancer.org](http://www.skincancer.org))
- \* American Cancer Society Skin Protection Federation ([www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org))

*Prevention — Most skin cancers are preventable. To best protect your health and skin, take the following steps:*

**Limit your time in the sun.** Avoid staying in the sun so long that you get sunburn or a suntan. Both result in skin damage that can increase your risk of developing skin cancer.

**Use sunscreen.** Before spending time outdoors, apply a broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 before going outdoors and teach older children and teens how to use sunscreen to protect themselves.

**Avoid tanning beds and tan-accelerating agents.** Tanning beds emit UVA rays, which are often touted as less dangerous than UVB rays. But UVA light penetrates deeper into your skin, causes precancerous skin lesions and increases your risk of skin cancer. As for suntan-accelerating products, the Food and Drug Administration warns against their use. Bronzing lotions that produce a tanned look without any sun exposure are a safe choice.

**Check your skin regularly and report changes to your doctor.** Examine your skin regularly — monthly if you have had skin cancer, have multiple moles or are at increased risk of skin cancer, and at least every three months otherwise — looking for the development of new skin growths or changes in existing moles, freckles, bumps and birthmarks. With the help of mirrors, check your face, neck, ears and scalp. To detect melanomas or other skin cancers, use the following **A-B-C-D** skin self-examination guide, adapted from the American Academy of Dermatology:

- **A is for asymmetrical shape.** Look for moles with irregular shapes, such as two very different-looking halves.
- **B is for irregular border.** Look for moles with irregular, notched or scalloped borders - the characteristics of melanomas.
- **C is for changes in color.** Look for growths that have many colors or an uneven distribution of color.
- **D is for diameter.** Look for growths that are larger than about 1/4 inch (6 millimeters).

If you have a family history of melanoma and have many moles on your body - especially on your trunk, where you may be less likely to notice changes - consider having regular examinations by a dermatologist. A general guideline for skin examinations is:

- **Age 20 to 39: Every three years**
- **Age 40 or older: Annually**

If you've had skin cancer, follow your doctor's advice for a follow-up schedule of examinations.

**(Prevention information from [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com))**