

The ABCDE's of Melanoma and Skin Self-Exam

Melanoma is one type of skin cancer. By doing a simple skin self-exam every month, you can improve your chances of finding a melanoma early. In addition to doing skin self-exams, you should have your skin checked regularly by a doctor or nurse specialist. A skin exam can be done during your regular checkups. Melanoma can be anywhere on your body. Check all of your skin carefully.

Melanoma is found most often on the arms and legs of women. In rare cases, it can occur in the vaginal and cervix areas. A woman's yearly OB/GYN exam should include checking for changes or new moles in the vaginal and cervix areas.

Men tend to get more melanomas on their chest, back, abdomen, head or neck.

The palms of the hands, the soles of the feet and the nail beds are common areas for dark skinned people to have a melanoma.

Some melanomas do not fit the rules listed in this handout. It is important to tell your doctor about any changes or new spots on your skin. You should also tell your doctor about any growths that look different from the rest of your moles.

When you do your monthly skin self-exam, look for spots with any of the following:

(A) Asymmetry: One half of the area does not match the other half.



This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

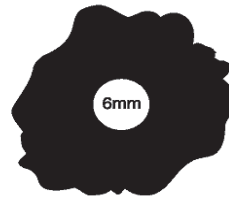
(B) Border: The edges are uneven or ragged.



(C) Color: The color is not the same all over and may have more than one shade or color present.



(D) Diameter: The size is larger than a pencil eraser (6 millimeters).



(E) Evolving: The mole is changing in size, shape or color.

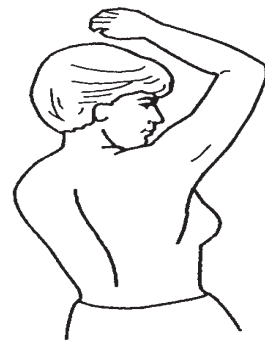
How to Check Your Skin

After a bath or shower, stand in front of a full-length mirror in a well lit room. Use a hand held mirror to look at areas of your body that are hard to see.

1. Begin with your face and scalp and work downward. Look at the front and back of your body in the mirror, then raise your arms and check your right and left sides.



2. With your elbows bent, look carefully at your forearms, underarms, fingernails and palms of your hands.



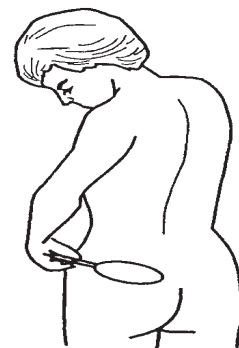
3. Check the backs of your legs, the top and bottom of your feet, toenails and between your toes.



4. Next, using a hand mirror look at the back of your neck and scalp. Carefully check your scalp by parting your hair.



5. Finally, use a hand mirror and check your back, groin and buttocks.



By checking your skin regularly, you will know what is normal for you. It is helpful to record the dates of your skin exams, and to write notes about the way your skin looks. If you find anything unusual, call your doctor right away.