



Skin cancer

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States, but it is also one of the most preventable.¹ Since more than 90 percent of all skin cancers are caused by sun exposure, taking simple steps to protect yourself can significantly reduce your risk.²

Evaluate your risk

While everyone is at risk for damage from the sun, certain groups of people are at a greater risk for developing skin cancer. Factors that lead to an increased risk include:³

Skin type

People with light skin that freckles easily, blond or red hair, or blue or green eyes are more likely to get skin cancer than people with darker complexions. Also, the more moles you have, the greater your likelihood of developing cancer.^{3,4}

Time spent outdoors

If your work or hobbies keep you outdoors much of the time, your risk is greater.

Where you live

Southern parts of the country are closer to the equator and get more sun, so people who live in these areas are at a greater risk for skin cancer than those who live in the northern U.S.⁴

Personal history

You are more likely to develop skin cancer if you have:^{3,4}

- Suffered serious sunburns early in life.
- Used tanning beds.
- Had any type of skin cancer before.
- Weakened your immune system due to excessive unprotected exposure to the sun, chemotherapy, organ transplant, lymphoma or HIV/ AIDS.

Family history

If one of your parents, siblings or children has had certain types of skin cancer, you have a 50 percent greater chance of developing it as well. If it was a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or niece or nephew, there is also an increased risk.⁵

The ABCDEs of melanoma⁶

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer, but it is nearly always curable if it is caught early. Know the difference between a normal, harmless mole and one that could be cancerous by evaluating growths for these five traits:

Asymmetry. The two halves of the mole do not match if you were to draw a line through it.

Border. An early melanoma often has uneven edges.

Color. A growth that is more than one color should prompt a visit to your doctor for further evaluation.

Diameter. A melanoma is usually larger than the size of a pencil eraser, although they can be smaller when first detected.

Evolving. Any change in size, shape or color, or any new symptom such as bleeding, itching or crusting, is a sign that you should make a call to your doctor.

If you notice any change on your skin, including new growths, moles that are changing, sores that won't heal or even symptoms that seem like eczema or psoriasis, make an appointment with your doctor. Skin cancer treatments are much more effective on cancers that are caught early.

Protect yourself^{1,3}

The best way to prevent skin cancer is to avoid the sun. Try to stay inside or in the shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when ultraviolet rays are the strongest and most damaging. Wear sunscreen that offers ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) protection, with a sun protective factor (SPF) of 15 or higher every time you go outside. Be sure to reapply sunscreen at least every two hours and whenever you have perspired heavily, gone swimming or dried off with a towel – even if your sunscreen is waterproof. And wear protective clothing, including a wide-brimmed hat and wraparound sunglasses that block as close to 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays as possible.

Know the warning signs

The good news is that skin cancer is curable, particularly when detected early. Knowing how to recognize the warning signs and performing a monthly skin check can help you catch a problem before it is too late. An annual exam by a dermatologist is another key part of an early detection strategy. Signs of a problem include:⁷

- An open sore or bump that itches, bleeds, crusts over and then repeats the cycle and has not healed in three weeks
- A red, irritated patch on the skin
- A shiny bump of any color
- A pink growth with an elevated border and a crusted indentation in the center or a growth that looks like a wart
- A scar-like area where the skin is shiny and tight

Asymmetry, uneven borders, more than one color, large diameter or changes to moles – these are the ABCDEs of melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer.

Resources

For more information and tips on protecting yourself from the sun, visit the Sun Safety Alliance at sunsafetyalliance.org Or check out the SHADE Foundation of America at shadefoundation.org for a list of fun indoor activities to keep your family entertained during the peak hours for ultraviolet radiation.



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Sources:

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