

Franciscan Skemp

Mayo Health System

Galesville Clinic



Common Concerns

by Chris Petersen

(Continued from July 29th Issue)

SIGNS OF SKIN CANCER: WHY SELF-EXAMINATION IS IMPORTANT!

Each year, skin cancer is diagnosed in more than 1 million people, and about 10,000 people die each year of this disease. More than 90 percent of skin cancers occur on areas regularly exposed to ultraviolet radiation (from sunlight or tanning lights), and this exposure is considered to be the chief cause. Other factors include a genetic tendency, chemical pollution and X-ray radiation.

Here are the signs of the three most common types of skin cancer:

Basal cell cancer, by far the most common skin cancer, usually appears as a smooth, waxy or pearly bump that grows slowly and rarely spreads or causes death.

Squamous cell cancer causes a firm, nodular or flat growth with a crusted, ulcerated or scaly surface on the face, ears, neck, hands or arms.

Melanoma is a more invasive cancer that involves the deep tissue around the cancer site and may spread to other sites. This requires a much more dramatic treatment such as removal by surgery, skin grafts to repair the area and some forms of chemotherapy.

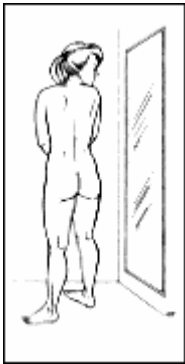
To aid in prevention of skin cancer, it is important to do a self-examination on a regular basis. The following guide will help walk you through the steps of checking for any changing spots or lesions that may be on your skin. (See Below)

Be aware of any rapid growth, bleeding, nonhealing sores or any other change in a lesion for any of these symptoms could also be signs of cancer.

What's the best way to do a skin self-examination?



1. First, you need to learn where your birthmarks, moles and blemishes are and what they usually look like. Check for anything new, such as a change in the size, texture or color of a mole or sore that doesn't heal.



2. Look at the front and back of your body in the mirror, then raise your arms and look at the left and right sides.

3. Bend your elbows and look carefully at your palms and forearms, including the undersides, and your upper arms.

4. Check the back and front of your legs.



5. Look between your buttocks and around your genital area.

6. Sit and closely examine your feet, including the bottoms of your feet and the spaces between your toes.

7. Look at your face, neck and scalp. You may want to use a comb or a blow dryer to move hair so that you can see better.

By checking yourself regularly, you'll get familiar with what's normal for you. If you find anything unusual, see your health care provider. The earlier skin cancer is found, the better.

If you notice a new growth, change in skin or a sore that doesn't heal in two weeks, see your health care provider. Don't wait for pain because skin cancers are usually not painful. The cure rate for skin cancer is high if you receive treatment early.

If you have a family history of melanoma and many moles on your body-especially on the trunk - regular examination by a dermatologist may be appropriate.

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