



# Skin Cancer: Spot It Early

**S**kin cancer is the most common type of cancer. The good news is that many types of skin cancer are easy to prevent, and most types can be cured if they're caught early.

Most skin cancer is caused by sun damage. Ninety percent of skin cancers occur on the face, neck, and arms. Light-skinned, blue-eyed people are more likely to develop skin cancer. However, dark-skinned people who get skin cancer tend to be diagnosed at a later stage. People of all skin types should protect their skin from too much sun.

## Prevention

Most skin cancer can be prevented by avoiding too much sun. By the time you are 20 years old, you have gotten as much as 80% of your lifetime sun exposure, so keep your children protected from the sun.

Avoiding too much sun exposure doesn't mean you can't go outside and be active. Just use these sun safety tips:

- **Avoid the sun when its rays are the strongest**—between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.
- **Wear clothing that protects you from the sun**—a wide-brimmed hat, long pants, sunglasses, and long-sleeved shirts.
- **Apply sunscreen that protects you from both UVA and UVB rays** with a sun protective factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Look for all of these terms (UVA, UVB, and SPF) on the label.
- **Look for shady spots outside.**

## Detection

Most skin cancers are easy to recognize and treat, but a small number are more serious.

There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell, squamous cell, and melanoma. Basal cell and squamous cell are the less serious forms of skin cancer. They usually look like sores that won't heal and tend to bleed more often than non-cancerous sores.

Melanoma is a cancerous mole. It is the most dangerous type of skin cancer,

leading to thousands of deaths every year. Most moles are harmless, but if a mole starts to change shape, color, or size, contact your doctor or other health care professional.

If you notice any unusual sores or moles, contact your doctor for a skin exam right away. If you have had skin cancer in the past or have a family history of melanoma, talk to your doctor about setting up annual skin exams.

## Remember ABCD for Examining Moles

Call your doctor or other health care professional if you notice any of the following changes in a mole:



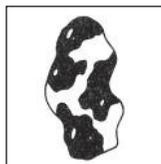
### ASYMMETRICAL SHAPE

One half does not match the other half.



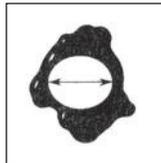
### BORDER IRREGULARITY

The edges are ragged, notched, or blurred.



### COLOR IS NOT UNIFORM

Watch for shades of red and black, or a red, white, and blue mottled appearance.



### DIAMETER

The mole is larger than a pencil eraser. (Harmless moles are usually smaller than this.)

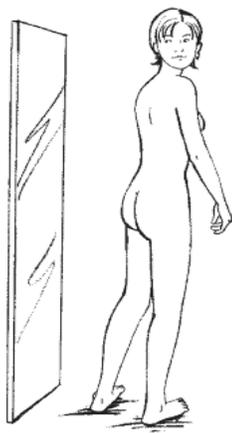


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## Examining your skin at home

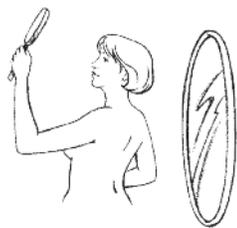
Examine your skin with a mirror or with another person's help. Look for unusual moles, spots, or bumps. Pay close attention to areas that are exposed to the sun a lot: hands, arms, chest, neck (especially the back of the neck), face, and ears. Note any changes and tell your doctor or other health care professional.

1. Examine the front and back of your body in a full-length mirror; then, examine the right and left sides with both arms raised.



2. Bend your elbows and look carefully at your forearms, upper arms, and palms.

3. Examine the back of your neck and scalp with the help of a hand mirror.



Part your hair or use a blow dryer to get a good look at your scalp.

**Monitor your moles and birthmarks** (See “Remember ABCD” on the front of this sheet). When you examine your skin regularly, you will know what is normal for you. If your moles do not change over time, there is little reason for concern.

## When to call Kaiser Permanente

**When you examine your skin, look out for:**

- Scaliness, oozing, bleeding, or pigment spreading into the surrounding skin.
- A bump or nodule on the mole, or any change in its appearance.
- Itching, tenderness, or pain.
- Unusual skin changes or growth, especially if they bleed and keep growing.

**Let your doctor or other health care professional know if you have a family history of malignant melanoma.** You may be at higher risk for developing the disease.

**A note to parents:** Babies and small children often have birthmarks. Most fade as the child grows. Tell your doctor or other health care professional if you notice any changes.

## Other resources

- Connect to our website at [kp.org](http://kp.org) to access health and drug encyclopedias, interactive programs, health classes, and much more.
- Contact your Kaiser Permanente Health Education Center or Department for health information, programs, and other resources.
- Skin Cancer Foundation: [skincancer.org](http://skincancer.org)
- National Cancer Institute: [cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other health care professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor. If you have questions or need more information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist. Kaiser Permanente does not endorse the medications or products mentioned. Any trade names listed are for easy identification only.