

# HOW TO CHECK YOUR SKIN

## What you'll need:

- Flashlight
- Two small chairs or stools
- Hand mirror with a long handle
- Hairbrush or blow dryer for checking your scalp
- Large wall mirror, preferably full-length, in a well-lighted area



1

Facing the wall mirror, examine your face including lips, ears, and eyes. Use a flashlight to check inside your mouth, nostrils, and ears. Check your neck, shoulders, and upper chest. Women should also check under breasts.



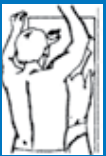
2

Using both mirrors, check behind your ears, neck, and upper back. While parting your hair with the blow dryer or brush, use both mirrors to check your scalp—front, back, and sides. Or have a partner or family member help.



3

Check your abdomen, front and sides. Use the hand mirror to check your mid- to lower back carefully. (The back is the most common site of melanomas in males.) Use the hand mirror or both mirrors to check all areas of your buttocks and genitals, including hidden parts.



4

Raise both of your arms and check all sides of your arms and hands, including between fingers and under fingernails. Then check under your arms and the sides of your upper body.



5

Sitting on a small chair or stool, prop each leg in turn on the other chair or stool. Check all sides of your legs from ankles to thighs. Check your feet, including the tops, heels, soles, between toes, and under toenails. (Legs are the most common sites of melanomas in females.)



## The Melanoma Network of Canada

Our organization is a national, patient-led organization whose mission is to provide melanoma patients and their caregivers with current and accurate information and services in the fight against melanoma.

Through our network, we provide funding and support services for awareness and education, advocacy and research.

## Help Us to Make a Difference

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# MELANOMA - WHAT YOU NEED To KNOW





## What is Melanoma?

Melanoma is a form of cancer that is characterized by the uncontrolled growth of pigment-producing cells (melanocytes) located in the

skin. It may begin in a mole, but can also begin in other pigmented tissues, such as in the eye or in the intestines. Survival rates are high if it is detected early. Melanoma develops when a cell's DNA genes become damaged. Overexposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation either from the sun or from tanning beds is the leading factor in the development of skin cancer and melanoma and is the most preventable cause of the disease. Melanoma is one of the fastest growing cancers worldwide. In Canada, this form of skin cancer has more than tripled over the last 30 years and continues to increase. The chance of developing melanoma increases with age, but this disease affects people of all ages. It is one of the few cancers to affect young adults and is the second most common cancer amongst 15-34 year olds. Excessive sun exposure in children and adolescents is likely to contribute to skin cancer in later life.

## Who is at Risk?

Studies have found the following risk factors for melanoma:

- **Ultraviolet (UV) radiation:** Both outdoor sun and artificial sources of UV radiation, such as sunlamps and tanning beds, cause skin damage and increase the risk of skin cancers and melanoma.
- **Fair skin** that burns or freckles easily (these people also usually have red or blond hair and blue eyes). Risk of melanoma is higher in people whose skin has a tendency to burn rather than tan.
- **Severe, blistering sunburns** as a child or teenager or adult increases risk of melanoma. Sunburns in adult hood are also a risk factor for melanoma.
- **Atypical, unusual moles with unusual shape or colour or or having more than 50 ordinary moles.**

- **Personal history of melanoma** or if you had one or more of the common skin cancers (basal cell carcinoma or squamous cell carcinoma).
- **Family history of melanoma:** About 10 percent of all patients have a family member with this disease.
- **Weakened immune system:** Weakened by certain cancers, or by immunosuppressant drugs or by HIV.

## Reduce your Risk through Prevention

Examine your skin regularly for changes (follow our skin check guide on the back page) and have it examined annually by a health care professional. Nearly 50% of melanomas are identified by the individual or a loved one. Reducing exposure to UV radiation, particularly through reducing sun exposure, lowers your risk. Do not use sun lamps or tanning beds, as the risk of melanoma increases up to 75% with exposure. UV damage builds up over time. Talk with your doctor about how to include good sources of vitamin D in your diet, including the use of supplements. If participating in outdoor activities when the UV index is 3 or higher, seek shade, always wear 100% UV blocking sunglasses to protect your eyes and cover up with long sleeved shirts, pants, gloves and broad brimmed hat or visor. Also, it is important to apply sunscreen all year round to exposed skin, reapplying often as directed and using a 'broad spectrum' sunscreen with sun protection factor (SPF ) of at least 30. Do not let the winter's cold fool you; UV radiation is dramatically higher on a snowy day. Snow and ice reflects up to 80 per cent of UV radiation, which is much higher than the amount reflected by water or dry beach sand.



Seek shade between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.



Wear sun protective clothing that covers as much of your body as possible.



Put on a broad-brimmed hat that shades your face, neck and ears.



Wear wrap-around glasses.



Apply SPF30+ broad spectrum water resistant sunscreen liberally to clean, dry skin, at least 20 minutes before being exposed to the sun, and reapply at least every two hours when outdoors.

## What to Look for: the ABCDEs of Melanoma

A mole that is changing in size, shape, color, or feel is often the first warning sign of melanoma. Most melanomas are dark brown/black and are often described as "ugly looking", so look for the 'ugly duckling' – a mole that doesn't look like the others. Changes can occur in an existing mole, or melanoma may appear as a new or abnormal-looking mole.

Melanoma can appear anywhere on the body, even on areas not exposed to the sun. In men, it is often found on the trunk (the area between the shoulders and the hips) or the head and neck. In women, it often develops on legs or arms. Melanoma is rare in people with dark skin. When it does develop in dark-skinned people, it tends to occur under the fingernails or toenails, or on the palms or soles of the feet.

The "ABCDE" rule can be used to help remember the warning signs:



**Asymmetry:** The shape of one half of the mole does not match the other.



**Border:** The edges are ragged, notched, uneven, or blurred.



**Color:** Shades of black, brown, and tan may be present. Areas of white, gray, red, or blue may also be seen.



**Diameter:** The diameter is usually larger than 6 millimeters (mm) (1/4 inch; the size of a pencil eraser) or has grown in size. Melanoma may be smaller when first detected.

**Evolving:** The mole has been changing in size, shape, color, or appearance, or growing in an area of previously normal skin. Also, when melanoma develops in an existing mole, the texture of the mole may change and become hard or lumpy. The skin may feel different and may itch, ooze, or bleed.