Is skin cancer common?
Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer and affects people of all skin colors. An estimated one in five Americans will develop skin cancer by the time they are 70 years old.\(^1\)

What causes skin cancer?
Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the primary cause of most skin cancers including melanoma and non-melanoma forms of skin cancer. Risk factors that increase the chances of developing skin cancer include: light skin or hair, blue eyes, history of blistering sunburns, a family history of skin cancer and immunosuppression.

Is skin cancer curable?
Most skin cancers are curable when caught early, making regular skin examinations to detect any concerning lesions important. People at higher risk for skin cancer should see a board-certified dermatologist once a year for a total body skin exam. If you have a personal history of skin cancer, you may need more frequent skin exams.

Should I examine my skin at home?
Absolutely! Regular skin self-exams can lead to early detection and treatment of skin cancer. ASDS recommends monthly self-exams. See your board-certified dermatologist for a skin exam to help you understand what to look for and how to identify spots that are normal versus those that require closer observation.

What should I look for?
- New or changing moles.
  - New moles can appear into your mid 30’s. Any new moles that develop after that should be examined by your board-certified dermatologist.
  - Concerning changes may include: increasing size, changing color or bleeding
- A translucent, red, brown or black skin growth that increases in size.
- Any skin growth that bleeds or itches.
- Open sores or scabs that do not heal.
- A lesion that lasts longer than you think it should (e.g., a pimple that does not go away for months).
- Be sure to examine your palms and soles closely, looking for any discoloration under your fingernails or toenails (this is especially important if you have skin of color).
- Ask your hair stylist to look through your scalp during your appointment.
Skin Cancer Exams
Step by Step Guide to Performing a Skin Examination

1. In a well-lit room that offers privacy, start the exam with your face. Examine your cheeks, forehead, nose, lips, around your eyes and ears (front/back). Use a hand mirror to help you see the areas.

2. Using your hand mirror, examine the front/back of your neck and scalp. Part your hair to help visualize your scalp.

3. Standing in front of a full-length mirror, examine the front and back of your arms, chest and abdomen. Women should lift their breasts to see the skin underneath. Examine the front/back of your hands and in between your fingers.

4. Next examine the front/back of your legs.

5. With your back to the full-length mirror, use a hand mirror to help you see your back, buttocks and back of the neck.

6. Sit on a chair, prop your foot up on another chair/stool and examine the inside/outside of your legs, top/bottom of your feet and in between your toes.

7. Use a hand mirror to exam your genitals.

8. Keep a journal to note any changes that may be discussed with your board-certified dermatologist. Download one for free at asds.net/self-exam.


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