Skin Cancer is COLOR BLIND

How Everyone Can Prevent and Detect Skin Cancer

EVERYONE IS AT RISK
People of all skin colors are at risk for skin cancer anywhere on their body. While skin cancer is less common in people of color, it is important for everyone to be aware of the disease. Most people do not know that when skin cancer is diagnosed in people of color, it is often more advanced and has a worse course and outcome than in Caucasians.

For people with skin of color, skin cancer often occurs in areas that are protected from the sun – such as the palms of the hands, the bottom of the feet, under the fingernails and toenails, inside the mouth, on the groin or genitals or between the buttocks.

HOW TO REDUCE YOUR RISK
Avoiding the sun’s harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays not only reduces your risk of skin cancer but also prevents aging of the skin such as wrinkles, dark spots and blotches. Tanning beds also emit harmful UV rays that cause skin aging and skin cancer. To help prevent skin cancer, remember to do the following:

Wear sun-protective clothing. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, pants or long skirt that will protect your arms and legs. Wear a wide-brimmed hat that will protect the face, ears and neck. Wear shoes that cover the feet and toes. Put on wraparound ultraviolet-absorbing sunglasses (these are important for protecting the eyes and the delicate skin around the eyes).

Seek out the shade. Minimize direct sunlight, particularly between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun is strongest.

Put on sunscreen. Apply broad-spectrum sunscreen with a sun-protection factor (SPF) of 30 or greater. Apply to dry skin 15 to 30 minutes before going outside. Reapply every two hours and after sweating or swimming.

Avoid tanning beds.

Get Vitamin D through dietary sources or supplements
It’s not necessary to get Vitamin D through ultraviolet light such as the sun or tanning beds. Vitamin D from food or supplements is processed the same way in the body while avoiding the increased risk of skin cancer and skin aging.

HOW TO DETECT SKIN CANCER
Because skin cancer may be painless or otherwise not bothersome, you may not notice it unless you look for it. Perform monthly skin self-exams and get regular skin cancer screenings by a board-certified dermatologist. The good news is that if you find skin cancer early, the cure rate is much higher. Tell your friends and family to do the same. You may save a life!

To find an ASDS member dermatologist who specializes in skin cancer, visit asds.net.
A step-by-step process for skin self-exams

Follow this guide to perform a monthly skin self-exam. Note: If you have a new, growing or changing mole, growth or sore – or anything that is painful, itches, burns, bleeds or is otherwise bothersome – have it checked promptly by a dermatologist.

You will need a brightly lit room, a full-length mirror, a handheld mirror, and a small flashlight. For hard-to-see places such as the scalp, back or the bottom of the feet, try to find a family member or friend to help.

• Examine your scalp. Part your hair to directly see the skin.

• Examine your face, looking closely at the lips, nose and ears including inside and behind the ears. Pull your upper lip up and out and your lower lip down and out to check the inside of your lips and your gums.

• Open your mouth and shine a light inside to look at your gums, the inside of your cheeks, your tongue and the roof and floor of your mouth.

• Examine the front and back of your hands and in between the fingers. Pay especially close attention to the palms and fingernails. Look for dark marks or dark stripes in your fingernails.

• Examine the front and back of your wrists and forearms.

• Examine all sides of your upper arms and armpits in front of the full-length mirror.

• Examine your neck, chest and belly. Check any body folds, such as under the breasts or belly.

• Turn your back to the full-length mirror and use the handheld mirror to examine your back and the back of your neck and shoulders.

• Using both mirrors, examine your buttocks and the backs of your legs. Separate your buttocks to look between them.

• Sit down and prop your leg up on a chair or stool. Carefully examine each leg. Then carefully examine each foot including the top and bottom and between the toes. Pay especially close attention to the bottom of the feet and the toenails. Look for dark marks or dark stripes in your toenails.

• Carefully examine all surfaces of the groin and genitals using a handheld mirror. Uncircumcised men should pull back the foreskin and check beneath it. Women should separate the vaginal lips and check inside with a light and handheld mirror.

ANNUAL SCREENINGS RECOMMENDED

Consider getting a skin cancer screening by a board-certified dermatologist once a year, particularly if you’re over 50 years old.

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