



Skin cancer

Learn how to protect yourself



Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the United States, but it is also the most preventable.¹ Since more than 90% percent of all skin cancers are caused by sun exposure, taking simple steps to protect yourself can make a big difference.²

Know your risk³

- People with light-colored skin that freckles easily, blond or red hair, or blue or green eyes are more likely to get skin cancer than other people.
- If your work or hobbies keep you outside in the sun, your risk is greater.
- Southern parts of the country are closer to the equator and get more sun, so those who live in these areas are at a greater risk for skin cancer.⁴
- You're more likely to get skin cancer if you used tanning beds, had serious sunburns early in life or had any type of skin cancer before. Your risk is also higher if you have a weakened immune system for any reason including chemotherapy, organ transplant, lymphoma or HIV/AIDS.^{3,4}
- If one of your parents, siblings or children has had certain types of skin cancer, you have a 50% greater chance of developing it as well. If it was a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or niece or nephew, there is also an increased risk.⁵



If you notice any change on your skin, make an appointment with your doctor. Treatments are much more effective on cancers that are found early.



Sources

- 1 Prevent Cancer Foundation website: *Skin Cancer* (accessed December 2017): preventcancer.org.
- 2 Skin Cancer Foundation website: *Skin Cancer Facts* (accessed December 2017): skincancer.org.
- 3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: *What Are the Risk Factors for Skin Cancer?* (accessed December 2017): cdc.gov.
- 4 Prevent Cancer Foundation website: *Frequently Asked Questions* (accessed December 2017): preventcancer.org.
- 5 National Cancer Institute website: *What You Need to Know About Melanoma and Other Skin Cancers* (accessed December 2017): cancer.gov.
- 6 WebMD website: *Melanoma/Skin Cancer Health Center* (accessed December 2017): webmd.com.
- 7 Skin Cancer Foundation website: *Do You Know Your ABCDEs?* (accessed December 2017): skincancer.org.

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Know the warning signs

The good news is that skin cancer can be cured, especially when it's found early. An annual exam by a dermatologist is a key part of an early detection strategy. Signs of a problem include:⁶

- An open sore or bump that itches, bleeds, crusts over and then repeats for more than three weeks.
- A red, irritated patch on the skin.
- A shiny bump of any color.
- A pink growth with an elevated border and a crusted indentation in the center or a growth that looks like a wart.
- A scar-like area where the skin is shiny and tight.
- Asymmetry, uneven borders, more than one color, large diameter or changes to moles — these are the signs of melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer.

Protect yourself^{1, 3}

The best way to prevent skin cancer is to avoid spending a lot of time in the sun.

Protect your skin by staying inside or in the shade between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when ultraviolet rays are the strongest and most damaging. Wear sunscreen that offers ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) protection, with a sun protective factor (SPF) of 15 or higher every time you go outside. Be sure to put on more sunscreen at least every two hours and whenever you have gone swimming or dried off with a towel or when you've been sweating a lot — even if your sunscreen is waterproof. Wear protective clothing, including a wide-brimmed hat and wraparound sunglasses that block as close to 100% of UVA and UVB rays as possible.

The ABCDEs of melanoma⁷

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer, but it is nearly always curable if it is caught early. Check your moles for these five traits:

- **Asymmetry.** The two halves of the mole do not match if you were to draw a line through it.
- **Border.** An early melanoma often has uneven edges.
- **Color.** A growth that is more than one color should prompt a visit to your doctor for further evaluation.
- **Diameter.** A melanoma is usually larger than the size of a pencil eraser, although they can be smaller when first detected.
- **Evolving.** Any change in size, shape or color, or any new symptom such as bleeding, itching or crusting, is a sign that you should call your doctor.

If you notice any change on your skin, including new growths, moles that are changing, sores that won't heal or even symptoms that seem like eczema or psoriasis, make an appointment with your doctor.

Learn more

For more information and tips on protecting yourself from the sun, visit the American Cancer Society website at [cancer.org/healthy/be-safe-in-sun.html](https://www.cancer.org/healthy/be-safe-in-sun.html).

