

Monthly Wellness SpotLight by PSA

IN GOOD HEALTH

HOW TO PREVENT SKIN CANCER

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in America. It affects 1 in 5 Americans, and more than 3 million cases of nonmelanoma skin cancer will be diagnosed this year, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Nonmelanoma skin cancers can be split into two subcategories—basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma—depending on where in the skin they occur. These both tend to be relatively low-risk cancers, especially when treated appropriately. Melanoma skin cancers are rarer, but melanoma can be a more aggressive form of skin cancer. The majority of melanomas are in the early phase and are easily treated with an excision. Regardless of the type, when skin cancers are caught early, they are often curable. It's important to be aware of your skin so you can protect it. Here are seven ways you can help prevent skin cancer:

1. **Get an Annual Check Up:** Annual visits to your dermatologist are a good way to keep track of skin changes—these are where skin cancer shows itself. The key is that skin cancer can look very harmless (like a nonhealing pimple or a normal mole) if you do not know what to look for.
2. **Wear Sunblock Everyday and Reapply:** UV radiation can still filter through the cloud cover on overcast days and cause damage to your skin. If exercising or in the water, sunscreen should be reapplied every 20 minutes. Reapplication is particularly important when UV index is the highest, which is usually between 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Dermatologists recommend a broad-spectrum water-resistant sunscreen with both UVA and UVB protection and an SPF of at least 30.
3. **Skip the Sunbathing Session:** You've applied sunscreen, but are you still directly exposing your skin to the sun? Seek shade as much as possible. Sitting under an umbrella and wearing a hat are critical. Sunbathing is bad because ultraviolet rays are harmful to the DNA of the cells in the skin that, when damaged, lead to signs of aging and then skin cancer.
4. **Avoid Tanning Beds:** The radiation from indoor tanning beds is sometimes stronger than radiation from the sun. This can cause skin cell mutations. Once cells are mutated, they continue to grow into tumors that are cancerous.
5. **Wear Protective Clothing:** Although it's tempting to wear minimal clothing, keep those shirts on! Better yet, seek protective clothing with an Ultraviolet Protection Factor – or UPF rating. A UPF 50 rating means that one in 50 of the sun's rays reaches the skin. UPF is partly dependent on the weave of the fabric (a tighter weave gives more protection), the weight and density of the fabric, and the color.
6. **Check Yourself:** If you have a history of extensive sun exposure, lighter skin pigmentation, and a family or personal history of skin cancer, you should check your skin once per month. And be sure to check all of your skin – even those hard-to-see spots and areas that don't generally see the sun, as skin cancers can still develop there. If you are in a lower risk category, then checking every three months or so is fine. If you notice any bleeding, burning, itching or a nonhealing sore, you should see a dermatologist.
7. **Follow the ABCDE's:** Do you know your ABCDEs? The American Academy of Dermatology says you should tell your doctor if your moles have the following symptoms of melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer:
 - Asymmetry
 - Borders (irregular or poorly defined)
 - Color (varying shades of tan white, red or blue)
 - Diameters larger than a pencil eraser
 - Evolving (changes in size, shape, or color)

What Will Happen at the Dermatologist's Office?

During the checkup, a dermatologist will examine your skin, including the scalp and areas of the skin that don't regularly see the sun. No blood work is performed at a skin cancer screening. If necessary, they will perform a biopsy to determine if it any spots are cancerous.