

Checking Your Skin for Signs of Cancer

Anyone can get skin cancer. Many spots people find on their skin are not cancer. But some might be cancer or precancer. Skin cancers can often be found early when they may be easier to treat. You can help by checking your own skin.

Checking your skin and getting it checked by a doctor or nurse is important for everyone. But these checks are even more important if you have a higher risk of skin cancer.



Know Your Risk for Skin Cancer

Talk to your doctor about your risk and how often you should check your skin. Here are some risk factors that can make a person more likely to get skin cancer:

- Being exposed to ultraviolet (UV) light from spending time in the sun or using tanning beds
- Having many moles
- Having fair or lighter skin, freckles, and light hair
- Having a history of skin cancer in your family
- Having a weak immune system
- Getting older



How to Do a Skin Check

Many doctors tell their patients to check their skin once a month. Skin checks are best done in front of a full-length mirror. A handheld mirror is also helpful. Make sure the room is well lit. You may need a spouse, partner, or close friend or family member to check your back and scalp.



Face the mirror

- Check your face, ears, neck, chest, and belly. Women will need to lift their breasts to check underneath.
- Check the skin under your arms, both sides of your arms, and the tops and palms of your hands. Also check between your fingers and under your fingernails.



Sit down

- Check the front of your legs, tops of your feet, in between your toes, and under your toenails.
- Use a hand mirror to look at the bottoms of your feet and the backs of your legs.
- Use the hand mirror to check your buttocks, private (genital) area, lower and upper back, and the back of your neck and ears. It may be easier to look at your back in a wall mirror using a hand mirror.
- Use a comb or hair dryer to part your hair so that you can check your scalp.



What to look for

It is hard to know if a change in your skin might be cancer. Here are some things to look for. Finding one or more of these things does not mean you have cancer, but that you should be checked by a doctor.

- A new or changing growth, spot, lump, or bump on the skin
- A sore that bleeds or doesn't heal
- A rough or dry red area on your skin, which might crust or bleed
- New itchiness, soreness, or pain
- A rough bump
- A mole (or other spot) that's new or changing in size, shape, or color

- A mole with an odd shape, uneven edges, or areas of different colors
- Spread of the color of a mole outside the edge of the mole
- Redness or new swelling outside the edge of the mole
- Change in the surface of a mole – scaliness, oozing, bleeding, new lump or bump.



If you find something new or different during a skin self-exam

- Draw a circle around the area with a marker or pen.
- If your phone has a camera, take a picture of it.
- Make an appointment to have a doctor look at it. The only way to know if it is skin cancer is to talk with an expert.



For more information and answers, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/skincancer or call us at **1-800-227-2345**.

