

Employee FAQ: Skin Self-Exam



Should I check my skin for signs of skin cancer?

Yes. When skin cancers are found early, they can almost always be treated successfully. The American Cancer Society reports that there is about a 95% survival rate for patients whose melanomas are found at one millimeter or less in thickness. It's best to find skin cancers when they are small.

What should I look for?

The most important warning sign for skin cancer is a mole or spot on the skin that is changing in size, color, or shape. Check your skin. Look for changes in spots, moles, or sores that do not seem to heal. See a doctor if you find anything new or odd.

How often should I check my skin?

It varies. People with lighter skin types, or a history of skin cancer, should check their skin more often than others. Many doctors recommend that people check their skin once a month.

How do I check my skin?

- Start in front of a wall mirror. You should have a chair and a hand-held mirror. A good time for doing this is just after you step out of the shower.
- While standing, examine your face, chest and arms (both sides of the arms) and belly.
- Then, sit down to look at the front surfaces of your legs and feet. Use the mirror to examine the back of your legs and check out the soles of your feet.
- Stand up again and use the mirror to inspect your buttocks and upper back.

While doing your self-exam, the American Academy of Dermatology recommends that you become familiar with your birthmarks, moles, and blemishes so that you know what they look like and can identify any changes in them. Follow the ABCDE Rule to look for changes in size, texture, shape and color of blemishes or sores that don't heal.

The ABCDE Rules:

- **A is for Asymmetry:** One half of the mole or pigmented spot does not match the other.
- **B is for Border:** The edges are ragged, irregular, or poorly defined.
- **C is for Color:** The color varies from one area to another; may have differing shades of brown or black, sometimes white, red or blue.
- **D is for Diameter:** The area is larger than 6 mm (as a general rule, the diameter of a pencil eraser) and is growing larger.
- **E is for Evolving:** Show any changes in size, color, shape or texture of a mole (or any skin changes) to your doctor.