

## Melanoma: Prevention and Early Detection

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that is common in both men and women. Its ability to spread to other parts of the body makes it one of the most dangerous forms of cancer. But, if melanoma is found early, treatment can be very successful. In fact, melanoma is one of the most preventable and curable forms of cancer.<sup>1,2</sup>

This year about 100,000 people will get melanoma. And about 7,000 people will die from the disease.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, the number of people who get melanoma has been increasing for the past 30 years, and is expected to continue increasing.<sup>4</sup>

This newsletter will explain melanoma and how to prevent it. The newsletter will also describe what to look for when you see a suspicious mole on your skin and how the lab can help if you have melanoma.

### What Is Melanoma?

Melanoma gets its name from skin cells called melanocytes.<sup>1</sup> Melanocytes make a pigment called melanin, which gives skin color and protects it from ultraviolet (UV) rays.<sup>5</sup> UV rays may come naturally from the sun or artificially from tanning beds. Too much exposure to UV rays can damage skin cells. At first, this can mean getting a sunburn. But over time, getting too much UV exposure can lead to melanoma.<sup>5</sup>

### Who is at Risk?

Most of the time, melanoma is diagnosed when a person is around 60 years old.<sup>3</sup> But melanoma can happen in people as young as 30 years old.<sup>3</sup>

Anyone of any age, sex, or race can get melanoma, but some people have a higher risk. People who are fair-skinned, spend a lot of time in the sun, and have a lot of moles have a higher risk.<sup>1</sup> They tend to get melanoma in places like their neck and back. People with darker skin have a lower risk of getting melanoma. But they are still at risk, and can get melanoma in places like their palms, the soles of their feet, and under their nails.<sup>1</sup>

People who had a lot of sunburns when they were young, use indoor tanning devices, and those with a family member who had melanoma also have a higher risk.<sup>3</sup>

### Reducing Your Chances of Getting Melanoma

Because melanoma is caused by exposure to sunlight and artificial UV light, reducing your exposure to these types of light can reduce your chances of getting melanoma (see Sidebar).<sup>2,6</sup> This is especially important for people who have an increased risk of getting melanoma, like people who are fair-skinned.<sup>1</sup> The best protection is to keep your skin covered and wear sunglasses and sunscreen. Choose “broad spectrum” sunscreen because it protects from 2 damaging types of UV rays called UVA and UVB.

### How to Check Yourself

Melanoma can appear as a new mole or as changes in an old mole. So it's important that you or a loved one check your skin every month by following these guidelines<sup>7</sup>:

1. Examine the front, back, right, and left sides of your body in the mirror with your arms raised.



### Ways to Lower Risk of Melanoma<sup>2,6</sup>

- Don't spend a lot of time in the midday sun
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat
- Wear tightly woven clothing that covers your arm and legs
- Wear sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays
- Use a broad spectrum sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher
- Avoid indoor tanning booths or beds

### Additional Information

For more information, visit [MedlinePlus.gov/melanoma.html](http://MedlinePlus.gov/melanoma.html), or these helpful websites:

- National Cancer Institute: [Cancer.gov/types/skin](http://Cancer.gov/types/skin)
- Melanoma International Foundation: [MelanomaInternational.org](http://MelanomaInternational.org)
- American Academy of Dermatology: [AAD.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/melanoma](http://AAD.org/public/diseases/skin-cancer/melanoma)

2. Bend your elbows and look carefully at forearms, upper arms, and palms.
3. Look at the backs of your legs, the spaces between your toes, and the soles of your feet.
4. Examine the back of your neck and scalp with a hand mirror.
5. Part your hair to get a better look at your scalp.
6. Check your back and buttocks with a hand mirror.

### What to Look for in a Mole: The ABCDEs<sup>®</sup> (Source: Dermpath Diagnostics)

#### A: Asymmetry

One side is different from the other



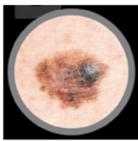
#### D: Diameter

Bigger than 6mm (1/4 inch)



#### B: Border

The edges are irregular and ragged



#### E: Evolving

Changes in size, shape, and color



#### C: Color

Varied shades of tan, black, and brown



If you find any moles like these, let your healthcare provider know right away.

### How Your Healthcare Provider Can Help

Your healthcare provider can see if your risk of getting melanoma is higher than average. They can also explain what you can do to help stop melanoma from happening, such as protecting yourself from the sun (see Sidebar on previous page), and looking for changes in a mole or skin. If your healthcare provider is concerned that a mole or other area of your skin might be cancer, they may remove a small piece; this is called a “biopsy.” They then send the biopsy to the laboratory for testing. Based on the results, your healthcare provider can decide if further testing or treatment is necessary.

### How Dermpath Diagnostics Can Help

Dermpath Diagnostics, a Quest Diagnostics company, offers tests to see if skin cancer is present. If you have melanoma, Dermpath and Quest also offer other tests that help your doctor decide whether certain drugs might work best for you.

Note: Dermpath and Quest work independently with insurance companies. If you have questions about your health benefits, please contact your health plan and ask which laboratories are part of your provider network.

### References

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