

May is Melanoma and Skin Cancer Awareness Month. There are more people diagnosed with *skin cancer* each year in the U.S. than all other *cancers* combined, and so it's important to understand this disease and what you can do to protect yourself.

Although melanoma comprises less than 5% of all skin cancers, it accounts for the vast majority of deaths caused by skin cancer as it tends to grow quickly and metastasize or spread to other organ systems of the body.

Background on melanoma:

- Melanoma is the fifth most common cancer among men and women.
- The incidence of melanoma has been dramatically increasing over the past 30 years.
- Everyone is at some risk for melanoma, but increased risk depends on several factors: sun exposure, number of moles on the skin, skin type and family history (genetics).
- Melanoma accounts for up to 3% of all pediatric cancers. The treatment of childhood melanoma is often delayed due to misdiagnosis of pigmented lesions, which occurs up to 40% of the time.

1. The vast majority of melanomas are caused by the sun.



On average, a person's risk for melanoma doubles if he or she has had more than five sunburns. In fact, one UK study found that about 86% of melanomas can be attributed to exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. While people with fair skin may be more likely to develop skin cancer due to sun exposure, people with darker skin tones are at risk as well.

2. Melanomas can develop anywhere on your body.



Unlike other forms of skin cancer, melanoma can develop in parts of the body that are normally exposed to sunlight, such as eyes, scalp, nails, feet, mouth or groin. These hidden melanomas are more common in people with darker skin.

3. About 30% of melanomas begin in existing moles, while the rest arise in normal skin.

Melanoma can appear as moles, scaly patches, open sores, or raised bumps. Most melanomas are black or brown in color, but some are pink, red, purple, or skin-colored.

4. Avoid indoor tanning salons Research has shown that exposure to UV radiation from indoor tanning devices can increase your risk of melanoma by 75%. In fact, sunlamps may be more dangerous than the sun because they can be used at the same high intensity every day of the year—unlike the sun whose intensity varies with the time of day, the season, and cloud cover.



5. Apply sunscreen everyday-even during the winter months



Research has shown that regular daily use of an SPF 15 or higher sunscreen can reduce the risk of developing melanoma by 50%. Make sure to apply sunscreen even when it's cloudy, overcast or during the winter months when there is no sunshine. Damaging UV rays can pass through clouds and snow reflects UV rays increasing your exposure.

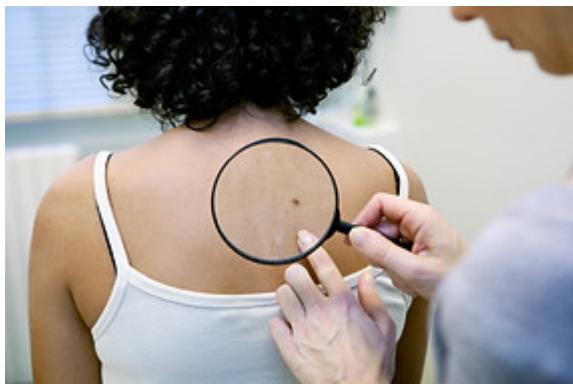
6. Know your family history

An estimated 10% of all people with melanoma have a family history of the disease.

Studies have now shown that your risk of melanoma is higher if one or more of your first-degree relatives (parents, brothers,

sisters, or children) had melanoma.

7. Regular skin checks are key

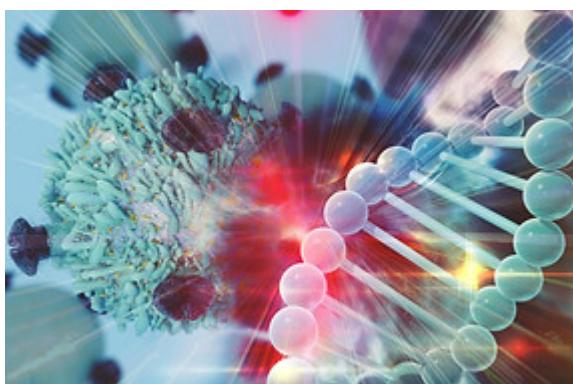


Regular checks by a doctor or nurse specialist, especially if you have a large number of moles or other risk factors, is key.

In addition, The **Skin Cancer Foundation** recommends that you do a head-to-toe **self-examination** of your **skin** every month. See the ABCDEs of skin cancer below for information on what to look for.

Also, make sure to tell your doctor if you see any new, unusual or changing moles or growths on your skin. While these skin checks will not prevent skin cancer from developing, they can help to catch it early when it is most easily treated.

8. Cancer immunotherapy is transforming melanoma treatment.



The development of [precision medicine](#) and [immunotherapy](#) are improving the prognosis of patients with melanoma. Researchers have determined that approximately 70% of melanomas have one of the following mutations: BRAF, GNA11, GNAQ, KIT, MEK1

(MAP2K1), and NRAS, and today there are seven FDA-approved immunotherapy options for melanomas. Despite this tremendous progress, many advanced metastatic melanoma patients still face a significant mortality risk due to the aggressive nature of this disease.

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The ABCDEs of Skin Cancer

When is a mole cancer? Look for these signs...

Asymmetry. One half doesn't match the appearance of the other half.

Border irregularity. The edges are ragged, notched or blurred.

Color. The color (pigmentation) is not uniform. Shades of tan, brown and black are present. Dashes of red, white and blue add to a mottled appearance.

Diameter. The size of the mole is greater than 1/4 inch (6 mm), about the size of a pencil eraser. Any growth of a mole should be evaluated.

Evolution. There is a change in the size, shape, symptoms (such as itching or tenderness), surface (especially bleeding) or color of a mole.

Source: <http://wb.md/2oqwqVU>