



BASIC INFORMATION

Skin self-exam means checking your own skin regularly for any abnormal growths or unusual changes. This helps you detect and treat skin cancer (or other skin abnormalities) as early as possible. Two types of skin cancer (basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma) are almost always cured once correctly diagnosed. With melanoma (the most serious type of skin cancer), early diagnosis is essential to start treatment before it spreads.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) and the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD) recommend that people should perform a skin self-exam once a month. It may take about 10 to 15 minutes. Along with your self-exam, always practice sun-protection care by using a sunscreen (SPF of 15 or higher) with both UVA and UVB protection. Wear protective clothing, and limit exposure time to the sun.

Get to know your skin, so you know what is normal for you. The first time you do the self-examination, locate all moles, warts, birthmarks, scars, spots, bumps, lumps, or other skin markings. It may be difficult to remember the color, shape, and size of each, so you may want to write down the information or draw a sketch of each area and abnormality.

HOW THE TEST IS PERFORMED

- The easiest time to do the exam may be after you take a bath or shower. Women may wish to perform their skin self-exam at the same time that they perform their monthly breast self-exam.
- Ideally, the room should have a full-length mirror and bright lights so that you can see your entire body well. Use a hand-held mirror also. It is very important to be able to examine all areas of your skin, including hard-to-see areas, such as the genitals, buttocks, scalp, and back.

WHEN YOU ARE PERFORMING THE TEST, LOOK FOR:

- New skin markings (e.g., moles, blemishes, colorations, bumps).
- Moles that have changed their size, texture, color, or shape.
- Moles or lesions that won't heal or that continue to bleed.
- Moles with ragged edges, differences in colors, or lack of symmetry.
- Observe and examine your entire body, both front and back, in the mirror.
- Check under your arms and both sides of each arm.
- Examine your forearms after bending your arms at the elbows, and then look at the palms of your hands and underneath your upper arms.
- Look at the front and back of both legs.
- Look at your buttocks and between your buttocks.
- Examine your genital area.
- Observe your face, neck, back of neck, and scalp. It is best to use both a hand mirror and full-length mirror, along with a comb, to see areas of your scalp.
- Look at your feet, including the soles and the space between your toes.
- Have a partner, friend, or relative help by examining hard-to-see areas. You may want to them to take photographs of your body (or certain moles) every six months to one year. Sometimes it is difficult to tell if a mole has grown or changed, or a new one has developed, and a photo may help.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You find any new abnormalities on your skin, or if you see changes in size, color, or texture of old moles or skin lesions. You should also call if you have a skin lesion (sores) that won't heal.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page