The ABCDEs of Spotting Melanoma

A few simple tricks can help you check for this deadly skin cancer.

What is melanoma?
Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that can develop anywhere on your body and in people of any skin color.

In white people, melanoma is most common on the face, arms, leg and back.

In people of color, melanoma is most common on the palms of the hand, the soles of the feet, and fingernail and toenail beds.

What does melanoma look like?

It can be hard to see signs of skin cancer if you don’t know what you’re looking for. One simple trick to help you spot melanoma:

- **Asymmetry**: One side of the mole is different from the other.
- **Border**: Mole has an irregular border (edge) that is not well-defined.
- **Color**: Colors (or shades of color) vary from one area of the mole to the next.
- **Diameter/Dark**: Mole measures 1/4 inch or larger (about the size of a pencil eraser) or is darker than other moles.
- **Evolving**: The mole is changing in shape, size or color.

Remember your ABCs:

- **A** = Asymmetry
- **B** = Border
- **C** = Color
- **D** = Diameter/Dark
- **E** = Evolving

There’s a map for that.
The American Academy of Dermatology has a downloadable body mole map where you can make notes during your self-exams.

Beware the ugly duckling

The “ugly duckling” is a mole that looks different from all the others, and it’s another warning sign of melanoma.

Screening saves lives!

Another tool to put in your skin cancer detection toolbox? Yearly screenings, which are especially important if you’re at increased risk for skin cancer.

Melanoma is highly treatable when it’s caught early.

Knowing the warning signs of melanoma and regularly checking your skin can help you spot skin cancer early, before it has a chance to spread.

Treating melanoma

How melanoma is treated depends on how deep it is and if it has spread.

- Lower-stage melanomas are removed with minor surgery that cuts out the cancer and some of the normal skin surrounding it.
- More advanced melanomas may call for more invasive surgery and/or other treatments, such as radiation therapy.

When in doubt, check it out!

If you have a mole that looks like it might be a problem but you’re not sure, talk to a healthcare provider.

Some risk factors for melanoma

- **Freckles**: Freckles have a higher risk of melanoma.
- **History of melanoma**: A family history of melanoma increases the risk.
- **History of frequent or intense sun exposure**: People who spend a lot of time in the sun are at higher risk.
- **Blue or light-colored eyes**: People with blue or light-colored eyes are at higher risk.
- **Freckles**: People with many freckles are at higher risk.
- **History of melanoma**: A family history of melanoma increases the risk.

99% of melanomas spread to farther body sites, such as organs, if not caught early. The average 5-year survival rate for melanomas that are caught early is about 99%. Once melanomas spread to the lymph nodes, the 5-year survival rate drops to 62%.