



# Skin Care: What You Need to Know

By Serena Mraz, M.D.

For many cancer screenings, your doctor performs the test because you aren't able to see inside your body. But, for skin cancer, you have the chance to do your own regular screenings to find out if you have cause for concern. When detected early, skin cancer has a cure rate of about 95 percent.

It's important to learn how to prevent skin cancer, recognize the early signs and to give yourself and your family members a head-to-toe look-over. Know your moles, how they are growing and if any discoloration occurs; take note of any new bumps or sunspots; and tell your doctor about sores on your skin that won't heal.

### About Skin Cancer

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in the U.S.: More than 1 million cases are diagnosed annually. The two most common skin cancers are basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas, which are often treatable with surgery. Melanoma, the most serious type of skin cancer, is curable when treated early.

Melanoma can occur anywhere on the skin. In men, melanoma most often appears on upper body—between the shoulders and hips, and on the head and neck. In women, melanoma often develops on the lower legs.

More than 90 percent of all skin cancers are caused by sun exposure, and a person's risk for skin cancer doubles if he or she has had five or more sunburns. People with fair skin, freckling, light hair or blue eyes also have a higher risk of developing skin cancer.

Some cancers are more common in aging skin. As we age our skin changes as well—we experience dryness, rough patches, wrinkles and dark spots, and the skin starts to sag and appear thinner.

### Skin Cancer Prevention

Even if you already have sun damage, you are never too old to prevent further damage. By taking good care of your skin you can minimize the chance of developing skin cancer. That includes doing the following:

**Protect yourself from the sun.** Always use sunscreen if you are going to be in the sun for more than 20 minutes. Make it a habit to apply sunscreen with a SPF of 15 or higher every morning. If you are spending the day



Photo: Serena Mraz, M.D., (left) performs a skin cancer examination on patient Krystina Brown.

outside, reapply sunscreen every two hours.

**Don't smoke.** Breathing in cigarette smoke and other environmental toxins can break down your skin's collagens and elastins, put you at risk for many types of cancer, and result in unhealthy and unattractive skin.

**Eat healthy, get enough sleep and reduce stress.** Your skin is a window into your internal health. When something's awry with your body, it often shows on your skin.

Skin cancer is often detected by looking at the symmetry, border irregularities, color variations and diameter of moles. However, tracking mole evolution is most important. Has the mole changed in appearance? Do your self-screening and tell your doctor about any changes you notice. It's always better to be checked out than to guess whether a mole is cancerous.

*Serena Mraz, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist with Solano Dermatology Associates and is on staff at Sutter Solano Cancer Center.*

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