

Love the Skin You're In

By Serena Mraz, M.D. a board-certified dermatologist on staff at Sutter Solano Cancer Center

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 screening every day. Performing a monthly skin exam from head to toe is one way to find out if you have cause for concern. When detected early, skin cancer has a cure rate of about 95 percent.

May is Skin Cancer Awareness Month and provides an opportunity 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. 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, even where the sun doesn't shine. 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.

In dark-skinned people, melanoma often appears:

- under the fingernails or toenails
- on the palms of the hands
- on the soles of the feet

According to the American Cancer Society, men have a higher rate of melanoma than women. People with fair skin, freckling, light hair or blue eyes also have a higher risk of developing skin cancer.

According to the National Cancer Institute, more than 1 million cases of skin cancer are diagnosed annually. 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.

In my dermatology practice we often see people in their 50s and 60s who have skin cancer. However, it's no longer rare to diagnose skin cancer in a 20-year-old who has enjoyed his or her youth in the sun or on tanning beds.

Three tips for preventing skin cancer

By taking good care of your skin you can minimize the chance of developing skin cancer. That includes doing the following:

- **Stay out of the sun.** Getting sunburned as a child is a big risk factor, and even tanning just once in a while may put you at risk for melanoma, a serious type of skin cancer. You can't turn back the clock and wish away childhood sunburns, but you can try to help yourself now and in the future. Use sunscreen, wear a broad-brimmed hat and protective clothing, and stay in the shade instead of direct sunlight.
- **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.

SPF should be your BFF

Don't let a trip to the beach or the pool be the only time you reach for sunscreen. The sun is up there 365 days a year and it's smart to wear skin protection all year long. Everyday exposure counts—you don't have to be actively sunbathing to get a damaging dose of the sun. You're exposed during everyday activities like shopping, picnicking, walking, jogging, gardening, and even waiting for a bus.

Make it a habit to apply sunscreen with a SPF of 15 or higher every morning. Apply an ounce (2 tablespoons) of sunscreen to your entire body 30 minutes before going outside. Reapply every two hours. Be sure to cover often-missed spots: lips, ears, around the eyes, neck, scalp if hair is thinning, hands and feet. Wear a hat and don't forget your sunglasses with UV-blocking lenses.

Early detection may save your life

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. There's a strong correlation between thickness and prognosis, but in early stages, even the most dangerous skin cancer—malignant melanoma—is thin, so the prognosis is great with early detection.

The vast majority of skin cancer cases are successfully treated by removing the cancer, especially such types as common basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas. When the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes or other organs, surgery, radiation and/or chemotherapy may be needed. As with most cancers, early detection can be the difference between life and death.

Free skin cancer screening

Each year Sutter Solano Cancer Center conducts a free skin cancer screening in collaboration with Solano Dermatology Associates. Take the first step to determine if you are at risk.

Monday, May 12

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Solano Dermatology Associates Office

2290 Sacramento Street in Vallejo

Tuesday, May 13

9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

Sutter Solano Cancer Center

127 Hospital Drive, Suite 204 in Vallejo

Please call Sutter Solano Cancer Center at 707-554-5326 for more information and to see if you're eligible.

PHOTO

[skin-cancer.jpg]

Serena Mraz, M.D., (left) performs a skin cancer examination on patient Krystina Brown. Sutter Solano Cancer Center will host free skin cancer screenings on May 12 and 13 in Vallejo.