

Detecting and Diagnosing Skin Cancer Fact Sheet

In an effort to try to reverse skin cancer mortality, dermatologists are continually employing new diagnostics, refining detection guidelines and providing patients with the tools they need to properly examine their own skin for signs of skin cancer. Dermatologist Ellen S. Marmur, MD, FAAD, chief of the division of dermatologic and cosmetic surgery at The Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York, outlined the latest developments:

New Technologies for Diagnosing Skin Cancer

- Technological advances in computers, lasers and other polarizing light sources are providing dermatologists with tools to enhance the evaluation of suspicious lesions and, in some cases, decreasing the number of biopsies needed for an accurate diagnosis.
- One of the newest technological developments in the fight against skin cancer is the use of sophisticated imaging to scan and enhance certain features of suspected lesions. Similar to how a computerized tomography (CT) scan highlights areas of the brain for abnormalities, imaging devices can now work on the skin to help detect cancerous tissue.
- Another exciting technology dermatologists are using to evaluate suspected skin cancers is a hand-held light device known as dermoscopy that can look at the pigment of the skin through specialized filters that magnify and polarize lesions.
 - Similar to how filters are used on cameras to create certain backgrounds, filters are used on this device to enhance certain features of lesions – such as brown or red background colors that could indicate a melanoma (the deadliest form of skin cancer).
 - One of the main benefits of dermoscopy is the ability to immediately evaluate a potential melanoma based on its magnified characteristics, which could help decrease the number of biopsies needed to make an accurate diagnosis, or can push the physician to biopsy a borderline lesion that appears more suspicious with the assistance of the dermatoscope.
- Newer computer systems are being used in conjunction with hand-held photography devices to more accurately diagnose melanomas.
 - The photo device takes a digital picture of the suspicious lesion, which is then magnified on a computer screen for closer examination.

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November is National Healthy Skin Month

- The computer system contains a database of characteristics of approximately 100,000 evolving melanomas, which the lesions are then graded against to see if certain features score high enough on the scale to warrant a biopsy.
- The improvement of early detection methods is helping dermatologists find an increasing number of smaller skin cancers. Detecting skin cancer in its earliest stage means better cure rates and survival rates.

New Self-Exam Tools

- An analysis of 2001-2005 data from the Academy's National Melanoma/Skin Cancer Screening Program supports the need for people to watch their moles for changes.
 - A study of the data published in the July 2007 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology* found those who indicated they had a mole that changed recently in size, color or shape were two times more likely to be diagnosed with a suspected melanoma.
- To enhance a patient's ability to detect the warning signs of skin cancer while performing a skin self-examination, the American Academy of Dermatology (Academy) is refining the ABCDs of melanoma detection by adding an "E."
- The letter "E" stands for Evolving – a mole or skin lesion that looks different from the rest or is changing in size, shape or color. Other qualities of moles for which individuals should check their skin include:
 - Asymmetry – one half unlike the other half
 - Border – irregular, scalloped or poorly defined
 - Color – varies from one area to another; shades of tan and brown, black; sometimes white, red or blue
 - Diameter – the size of a pencil eraser or largerIf a mole exhibits any of these characteristics, it should be brought to a dermatologist's attention.
- The Academy's Body Mole Map is a tool that individuals can use to track their moles. The map provides information on how to perform a skin self-exam, images of the ABCDEs of melanoma and space for people to track their moles to determine any changes over time. (Free downloads of the Body Mole Map are available at www.melanomamonday.org.)
- Recent research shows that involving a partner in the skin self-examination process can improve the early detection of skin cancer. As such, the Academy is encouraging people to "Screen the One You Love" on popular holidays – such as Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day and Grandparents Day.

- Get to know your skin and if something is bleeding or doesn't look right, then see a dermatologist. Skin self-exams should be a regular part of everyone's health regimen.

2008 Skin Cancer Facts¹

- More than 1 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States in 2008.
- Basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas are the two most common forms of skin cancer, but are easily treated if detected early.
- More than 75 percent of skin cancer deaths are from melanoma.
- The five-year survival rate for people whose melanoma is detected and treated before it spreads to the lymph nodes is 99 percent.
- One American dies of melanoma almost every hour (every 62 minutes). In 2008, 8,420 deaths will be attributed to melanoma – 5,400 men and 3,020 women.

¹*The American Cancer Society, 2008 Cancer Facts and Figures,*
<http://www.cancer.org/downloads/STT/2008CAFFfinalsecured.pdf>.

For more information on skin cancer, visit the American Academy of Dermatology's Web site at www.aad.org.

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