fact sheet

MELANOMA: EARLY DETECTION, RISK FACTORS AND SCREENING

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer (the uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in the skin). People of all ages and racial and ethnic backgrounds can develop melanoma. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is thought to be the biggest risk factor for most melanomas. The main source of UV light is the sun, although tanning lamps also emit high levels of UV light. Aside from UV radiation, there are several other factors that increase the chances that a person will develop melanoma. It is important to be aware of these risk factors, as melanoma is most treatable when detected in its early stages.

RISK FACTORS FOR MELANOMA INCLUDE:

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Exposure to UV radiation from the sun and from tanning beds increases the risk of melanoma.

Environment. Living in regions at higher altitude or with bright year-round sun can increase the risk of melanoma.

Fair skin and freckles. Melanoma occurs more frequently in people with fair skin. Freckles also mark a mild increase in risk.

Light hair and eye color. The risk of melanoma is higher for people with blue eyes and those who have blond or red hair.

A large number of ordinary moles. People who have more than 50 moles are at an increased risk of developing melanoma.

Abnormal moles. Moles that are larger than normal, have several shades of pigment or have fuzzy or indistinct edges are more likely to become cancerous than ordinary moles.

Family history. Melanoma can sometimes run in families; having two or more close family members who have melanoma is a strong risk factor.

Non-melanoma skin cancer. People who have other kinds of skin cancer are at a higher risk for developing melanoma.

EXAMINING YOUR SKIN

Get a professional skin examination from a dermatologist once a year and learn how to perform a monthly skin self-examination. Skin self-exams do not require any special medical equipment. All you need are your eyes, a mirror and the knowledge of what to look for.

• Perform skin self-examinations in a well-lit room in front of a full-length mirror. Use a handheld mirror for hard-to-see places. The best time to do a skin self-exam is after a shower or bath.

• Learn the pattern of your moles, freckles or other birthmarks so that you will notice any changes.

• Look for new growths, spots, bumps or sores that do not heal normally.

- Don't forget hard-to-see areas of your body such as your head, the underside of your arms, the backs of your legs and between your toes.
- Know the "ABCDEs" of moles. If you have any moles that fit the following criteria, ask your doctor to check them out.

Asymmetrical: Is the mole oddly shaped?

Border: Does the mole have irregular or vaguely defined borders?

Color: Does the mole have uneven coloring or multiple colors?

Diameter: Is the mole larger than a pencil eraser or is it growing in size?

Evolution: Has the mole grown or changed in any way?

Cancer*Care*® Can Help

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