

SKIN CANCER: Protect the Skin You're In

Louisiana is blessed with warm weather and sunshine year round. But this blessing comes at a cost. Excessive exposure to the sun puts you at greater risk for skin cancer, including melanoma. Sunscreen, a hat, sunglasses, shade and loose clothing are your best defense against the sun's harmful rays.

At Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center, we are committed to helping you protect the skin you're in. This may be accomplished if you cover up, examine your own skin monthly and have regular screenings by a health care professional.



What Is Skin Cancer?

Each year, one million people in the United States learn that they have skin cancer. The most deadly form of skin cancer is *melanoma*, which often starts as a small mole-like growth that increases in size and may change in color.

The two most common kinds of skin cancer are *basal cell carcinoma* and *squamous cell carcinoma*. These two kinds of skin cancer are often referred to as nonmelanoma skin cancers. Nonmelanoma skin cancers usually develop on sun exposed areas of the body, like the face, ears, neck, lips and the back of hands. While nonmelanoma skin cancers rarely spread, it is important that they are found and treated early.

*What Are the Risk Factors for Skin Cancer?*¹

Although anyone can get skin cancer, some individuals are particularly at risk.

- Skin that burns, freckles, gets red easily or becomes painful in the sun
- Blue or green eyes, blond or red hair
- Personal or family history of skin cancer
- Constant exposure to the sun through work and play
- A history of sunburns early in life
- Certain types and/or a large number of moles

EXAMINATIONS

It is recommended that you have regular screenings by a health care professional qualified to diagnose skin cancer. You should also examine your own skin. The best time to do a self-exam is after a shower or bath. You should check your skin in a well-lighted room using a full-length mirror and a hand held mirror. Examine birthmarks, moles and blemishes. Where are they and what do they look like? Check your skin monthly, and be alert to changes in number, size, shape or color of spots on your skin or sores that do not heal. If you find anything unusual, see your doctor right away. Remember the earlier skin cancer is found the better the chance for cure.

How to Examine Your Own Skin²

Face the mirror:

1. Check your face, ears, neck, chest and belly.
2. Check both sides of your arms and the tops and palms of your hands.

Sit down:

1. Check the front of your thighs, shins, tops of your feet and in between your toes.
2. Now look at the bottom of your feet, your calves and the backs of your thighs – first one leg, then the other. (You will need a hand mirror for the backs of your thighs.)

Stand up:

1. Use the hand mirror to check the buttocks, lower back, upper back and the back of the neck. (It may be helpful to look at your back in a wall mirror by using a hand mirror.)

Check with your health care professional or dermatologist if you find something that concerns you.



Choose Your Cover³

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun is the main cause of skin cancer. Cover up and you will reduce your exposure to the sun's rays. Fortunately, there are many options to protect your skin.

Seek shade from UV rays, especially during midday

Trees, beach umbrellas or tents are good sources of shade when you are outdoors during the hottest part of the day.

Cover up to protect exposed skin

A shirt, beach cover-up or pants with a tight weave are all good choices for cover.

Get a hat with a wide brim

Up to 80 percent of skin cancers occur on the head and neck, so a wide-brimmed hat is a great way to shade your face, ears, scalp and neck.

Grab shades that block both UVA and UVB rays

Sunglasses protect the delicate skin around your eyes.

Rub on sunscreen

Remember to use sunscreen of at least SPF 15 or higher and with both UVA and UVB protection.

For more information about skin cancer, contact your health care provider or Mary Bird Perkins Cancer Center about a free skin cancer screening.

(225) 215-1234

(888) 616-4687

www.marybird.org

 **MARY BIRD PERKINS
CANCER CENTER**

²American Cancer Society. www.cancer.org. *Skin Self-Exams: Tips on Spotting Cancers Early*. May 5, 2001.

³Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. www.cdc.gov. *Choose Your Cover*. July 9, 2002.