



For Melanoma, Know Your **ABCDs**.

- A.** Asymmetry. One half does not match the other half.
- B.** Border irregularity. The edges are notched or ragged.
- C.** Color. Varied shades of tan, black and brown.
- D.** Diameter. Greater than six millimeters.

Melanoma is a serious form of skin cancer. The source of melanoma is the melanocytes, cells that produce dark protective pigment known as melanin. Melanoma may first manifest itself as individual lesions. These lesions may be dark brown, black or multicolored growths with irregular borders. The lesions may also become crusted and bleed.

Anyone at any age can get melanoma, and it can occur anywhere on the body. If you have fair skin, light hair, and blue, green, or gray eyes, you are especially vulnerable. You are also more at risk if you have a family history of melanoma, or have had melanoma in the past. These tumors can either arise in or near a pre-existing mole or may appear without warning. Because melanoma may spread to other organs, it is vital to treat this skin cancer as early as possible.

Melanoma

Can I Avoid This Condition?

Sunlight is a major cause of melanoma. This is especially true when overexposure results in sunburn and blistering. Therefore, the best way to reduce your risk of melanoma is to avoid prolonged exposure to sunlight, especially during peak sunlight hours (10 a.m.-3 p.m.). Ways to limit skin exposure to harmful ultraviolet rays include wearing UV rated sunglasses, broad-brimmed hats and protective, tightly woven clothing.

Furthermore, a broad-spectrum sunscreen should be applied liberally to all sun exposed skin (including the lips) on a daily basis, even cloudy days, and reapplied every 90 minutes during outdoor activities. Sunscreens should block both UVA and UVB rays and be rated SPF 15 or higher. Also, avoid tanning parlors and home tanning lights of any kind (self-tanning creams and sprays are OK).

And while taking those precautions, it's important to inspect your entire body for skin changes and visit your dermatologist regularly. Early detection of melanoma can save your life. Look for any irregularity in an existing or newly developed pigmented skin lesion (such as asymmetry, uneven border, color variability, diameter of more than 6mm, elevation, or bleeding). These potential signs of melanoma should be seen immediately by a dermatologist.

People with dark brown or black skin can also develop melanoma, especially on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, under nails, and in the mouth. Therefore, these areas deserve special scrutiny.

So What Treatment Can I Expect?

To confirm a diagnosis of melanoma, your dermatologist will want to perform a biopsy. A biopsy involves removing a portion of tissue, which is then examined by a dermatopathologist under a microscope. If cancer is confirmed, treatment is required. Generally, there are several ways to treat melanoma. Your physician's choice of therapy will vary, depending on the tumor's size, location, depth of penetration, and type of melanoma encountered. The physician will also take into account the patient's age and general health. Some of the treatment options currently available to you are: excisional surgery and Mohs' surgery (microscopically controlled surgery). Your dermatologist will discuss which of these treatment options is best suited to your situation.

Be a **Survivor** Not a Statistic.

At some point, one in every five to six Americans will develop skin cancer. At least 90% of these cancers result from exposure to the sun's ultraviolet radiation.

Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Although melanoma accounts for a small percentage of all skin cancer, it is responsible for more than 75% of all skin cancer deaths.

The American Cancer Society currently estimates that approximately 60,000 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed annually in the United States, with about 8,000 patients dying from melanoma each year.

Want To Learn More?

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