

# The ABCDs of skin self-exams

**H**ow well do you know the skin you're in? If a mole or other skin feature were to change, would it go unnoticed?

Skin cancer is usually easiest to treat in its earliest stages—and some skin changes are potential warning signs. That's where getting to know your skin comes in.

## Who's at risk for skin cancer?

We're all at risk, but some things can increase the likelihood of skin cancer. According to the American Cancer Society (ACS), you are at high risk if you: ➤ Have fair skin that sunburns or freckles easily ➤ Have many moles or irregular or large moles ➤ Have a family history of skin cancer, especially melanoma

**Check it out** It's a good idea to examine your skin about once a

month, advises the ACS. This may help you spot potential skin cancers early.

Changes to look for include a new growth, or lesion; an existing growth or mole that changes size, shape, or color; or a nonhealing sore.

Also, the ABCDs of moles can help you spot possible signs of melanoma:

**A** for **asymmetry**—half of a mole doesn't match the other half.

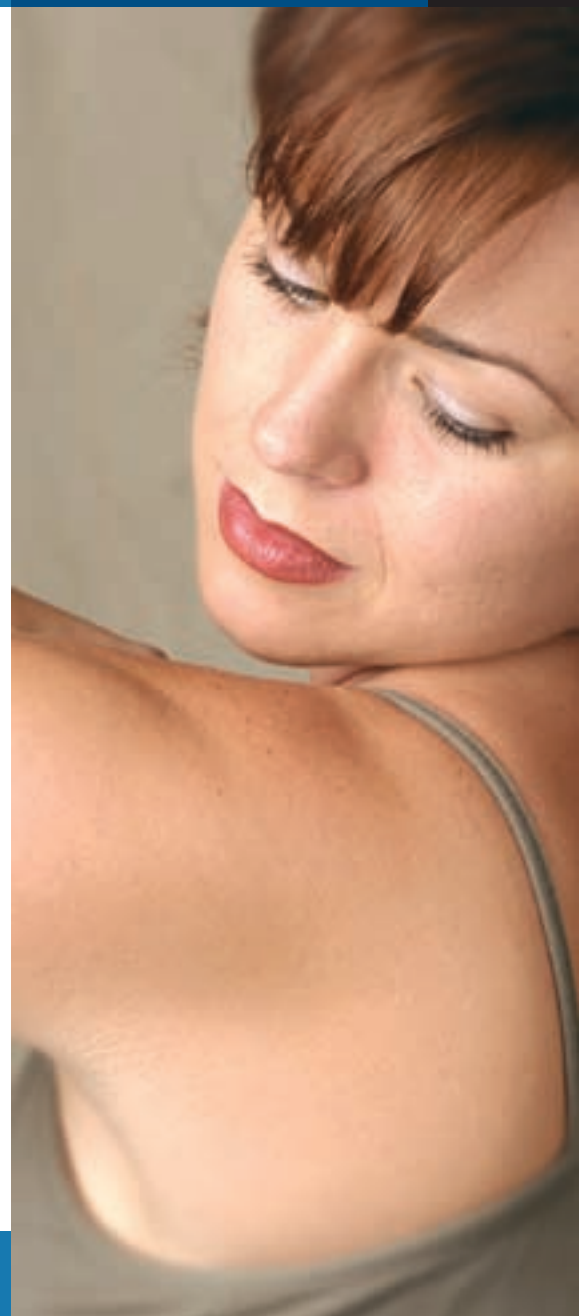
**B** for **borders** (edges) that are irregular.

**C** for **color**—the mole has many colors.

**D** for **diameter**—the mole is larger than a pencil eraser.

Check your skin in front of a mirror, and use a hand-held mirror for those hard-to-see places.

Every unusual finding isn't necessarily cancer, but if something concerns you, tell your doctor.



To learn more about skin cancer prevention, screening, and diagnosis, visit [cancer.org](http://cancer.org).

## Choosing the right sunscreen for your skin

With so many choices of sunscreen products to buy, deciding on the right one can be a challenge. Price alone is not an indication of quality. Based on independent laboratory testing, there are excellent sunscreen products in a range of prices.

Four things to look for when selecting sunscreen are:

**1. Broad-spectrum protection.** Find a sunscreen that protects against ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B

(UVB) sun rays; both can damage skin.

**2. Sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher.** An SPF of 15 deflects about 93 percent of UVB rays and allows you to remain in the sun 15 times longer than you normally would before getting burned. Higher SPFs deflect about 97 percent of UVB rays. Whatever SPF level you choose, no sunscreen provides 100 percent protection against UVB rays.

**3. Water-resistant or waterproof qualities.** Look for sunscreens labeled "very water-resistant" or "waterproof," which cannot be easily removed by sweating or swimming. Reapply sunscreen every two hours.

**4. Skin-appropriate form.** Pick the best kind of sunscreen for your skin type. Creams or lotions are best if your skin is dry; oil-free sunscreen is preferable if your skin is oily. There are also sunscreens for sensitive skin and for babies.