



# 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 asymmetric**—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, symptoms, screening, and diagnosis, visit the New Mexico Department of Health Cancer Prevention and Control Section at [cancernm.org](http://cancernm.org).

## Skin cancer prevention—you're in charge

We can't see them, but our world is awash with the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays, a major cause of skin cancer.

But you don't have to hide in the basement to protect yourself.

You can spend time outdoors and help prevent skin cancer with this advice from the American Cancer Society and the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD):

**Seek shade when you can.** This is particularly important when the

sun's rays are strongest, generally between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

**Cover your skin.** Wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, pants, and long skirts can help block UV rays. Fabrics with a tight weave usually provide better protection.

And remember, sunglasses aren't just for looks. Those that block 99 percent of UV rays can protect your eyes.

**Wear sunscreen.** Use a sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 15. Put plenty of it on

exposed skin; use more every two hours and after swimming, sweating, or towel drying.

**Avoid deliberate exposure.** Don't try to tan—either outdoors or in tanning beds. Neither practice is safe.

Although sunlight helps our bodies make vitamin D, try getting enough of the vitamin through healthy eating and supplements instead of more sun exposure, says the AAD. Sun exposure for 10 to 15 minutes twice a week usually supplies enough vitamin D.