



Watch for Spots! Know When to See Your Doctor

LiveLifeWell

When it comes to skin cancer, performing self-exams is important, but you also need to know when to see a doctor to have a spot checked out.

When Should I Get Checked By a Doctor?

Regular self-exams help you get familiar with your own skin, so you'll know what's normal and what's not. If you find anything out of the ordinary, see a doctor to get it checked out! Make an appointment with your doctor if you:

- Notice any changes to an existing mole, freckle, or spot.
 - Use the **ABCD Rule** as a guide:
 - **A is for Asymmetry:** One half of a mole or birthmark does not match the other.
 - **B is for Border:** The edges are irregular, ragged, notched, or blurred.
 - **C is for Color:** The color is not the same all over and may include shades of brown or black, or sometimes with patches of pink, red, white, or blue.
 - **D is for Diameter:** The spot is larger than ¼ inch – about the size of a pencil eraser – although melanomas can sometimes be smaller.
- Find a new marking with any of the warning signs of skin cancer.
- See anything on your skin that looks different from the last time you did a self-exam.

How Do I Perform a Self-Exam?

For your first self-exam, spend time carefully going over the entire surface of your skin. Learn the pattern of moles, blemishes, freckles, and other marks so you'll notice any changes for the next time. You should perform a self-exam:

- Once a month
- In a well-lit area, in front of a full-length mirror
- Using a hand-held mirror for areas that are hard to see

What Should I Look For?

Most people have moles, and almost all moles are harmless. Use these helpful tips to learn the difference between a harmless mole and a spot that might be skin cancer:

- **A normal mole** is most often an evenly colored brown, tan, or black spot on the skin. When identifying moles, remember they are:
 - Flat or raised, and round or oval
 - Usually less than ¼ inch across – about the width of a pencil eraser
 - Present at birth or can appear later. Once a mole appears, it will usually stay the same size, shape, and color for many years.
- **Basal cell and squamous cell cancers** are most often found in areas that get exposed to lots of sun, such as the head, neck, and arms, but can occur elsewhere. Look for new growths, spots, bumps, patches, or sores that don't heal after two to three months.
- **Melanomas** are usually identified as new spots on the skin or a spot that is changing in size, shape, or color. An important warning sign is when a spot looks different from all other spots on your skin (known as the *ugly duckling sign*).

Get Your Skin Checked by a Doctor – for Free!

Regular skin exams by a doctor can help you detect skin cancer early and treat it effectively. Preventive exams and screenings are 100% covered by Abbott when using network providers in the national BlueCross BlueShield and United Healthcare medical plans. Call the phone number on the back of your Abbott medical plan ID card to find out more.