

Skin Self-Exam. If you can spot it – you can stop it.

Skin cancer is the most common of all cancers, afflicting more than two million Americans every year. It is also the easiest cancer to cure, if diagnosed and treated early. When allowed to progress, however, skin cancer can result in disfigurement and even death. You should examine your skin from head to toe every month and see a dermatologist every year for a professional skin exam.

Q. How do I perform a self-exam?

A. Follow these steps:.

1. First inspect your hands, including the tops of your hands, your fingernails, your palms, and the skin between your fingers.
2. Next, stand in front of a full length mirror and examine your face and ears.
3. Part your hair to ensure you can clearly see your scalp.
4. Continue by inspecting your neck, chest, and torso; women should check under their breasts as well.
5. Lift your arms to examine your underarms, elbows, and the front and back sides of your arms.
6. Turn your back toward the full length mirror, and use a small handheld mirror to inspect your neck, shoulders, back, buttocks, and the back side of your legs.
7. To complete the exam, sit in a chair and examine your genitals, the front side of your legs, and your feet, including the tops of your feet, your toenails, heels, soles, and the skin between your toes.

Q. What are the warning signs?

A There are several signs you should watch out for – any skin growth that increases in size and appears pearly, translucent, tan, brown, black, or multicolored; a mole, birthmark, beauty mark, or any brown spot that changes color, increases in size or thickness, changes in texture, is irregular in outline, or is bigger than 6mm or 1/4" (the size of a pencil eraser); any spots or sores that itch, hurt, crust, scab, erode, or bleed; or open sores that do not heal within three weeks.

Q: Is there anything that can be done to prevent skin cancer?

A: Yes! And I can't say this often enough – use sun screen! About 90 percent of non-melanoma skin cancers are associated with exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun.

- Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher **every day**.
- Apply 1 ounce (2 tablespoons) of sunscreen to your entire body 30 minutes before going outside, and reapply every two hours, or immediately after swimming or excessive sweating.
- Try to avoid direct sun exposure between 10 AM and 4 PM.
- Do not burn.
- Avoid tanning and UV tanning booths.

If you detect anything suspicious – don't delay! Skin cancer can be cured with early detection and treatment. Call Dermatology Associates of the Lowcountry (843) 689-5259 (Hilton Head) or (843) 705-0840 (Bluffton / Okatie) right away to schedule a consultation.