

How to Perform a Skin Self Exam

1. Exam your body front and back in a mirror, then look at both your sides with your arms raised.
2. Bend elbows and look carefully at forearms, upper arms, under arms and palms.
3. Look at the backs of your legs and feet, between your toes and the bottom of your feet.
4. Examine the back of your neck and head using a mirror.
5. Check your back and buttocks using a mirror.

Skin Cancer Facts

Skin cancer is the most common and curable form of cancer. Each year in the United States, more than 1 million skin cancers are diagnosed. The three most common types of skin cancer are basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and melanoma (also called malignant melanoma).

Basal cell and squamous cell skin cancers are the most frequently diagnosed and the most curable of skin cancers. They usually appear in one place on the skin, rarely spreading to other parts of the body. However, if left untreated, they can grow locally within the skin and destroy surrounding tissues and structures such as nerves and muscles. Melanoma, which occurs less commonly, is more serious. When left untreated, melanoma can spread (metastasize) to other parts of the body. Early detection and treatment of melanoma are critical. (The “lentigo maligna” type of melanoma is often treated with Mohs surgery.) Several uncommon types of skin cancer are also treated with Mohs surgery.

The goal of treating skin cancer is to remove or destroy the tumor along with a surrounding margin of healthy tissue as protection against recurrence. In addition to Mohs surgery, physicians treat skin cancer in the following ways:

- Cryosurgery-Freezing the affected skin
- Curettage and electrodesiccation-Scraping the affected skin and then burning the remaining skin with an electrically heated needle
- Excision-Cutting out the tumor and the surrounding tissue
- Radiation therapy-Using X-ray radiation to destroy cancer cells
- Chemotherapy cream-Appling a chemical to the skin to destroy cancer cells