

## Skin Cancer Evaluations

### What you should know about checking your skin for suspicious moles.

One of the things that makes skin cancer so devastating is that it's a cancer that is relatively preventable. A combination of smart skin protection and regular skin checks will go a long way to ensure you don't needlessly suffer from the trauma of skin cancer. *Healthy Aging's* editor Grant Clauser recently sat down (in the shade) with dermatologist Amy Derick, MD, to discuss the importance of skin self-examinations.

### How frequently should you check your skin for suspicious moles and lesions?

Checking once month would be enough. Most people can have their spouse help keep an eye on them and provide a full look over once a month, especially if they're at high risk.

### At what age should you begin to check yourself?

You should start after puberty. Before puberty, the risk of melanoma is very low. The prevalence of melanoma in the 20-year-old set is increasing. Melanoma is a leading cause of death in people ages 20-28.

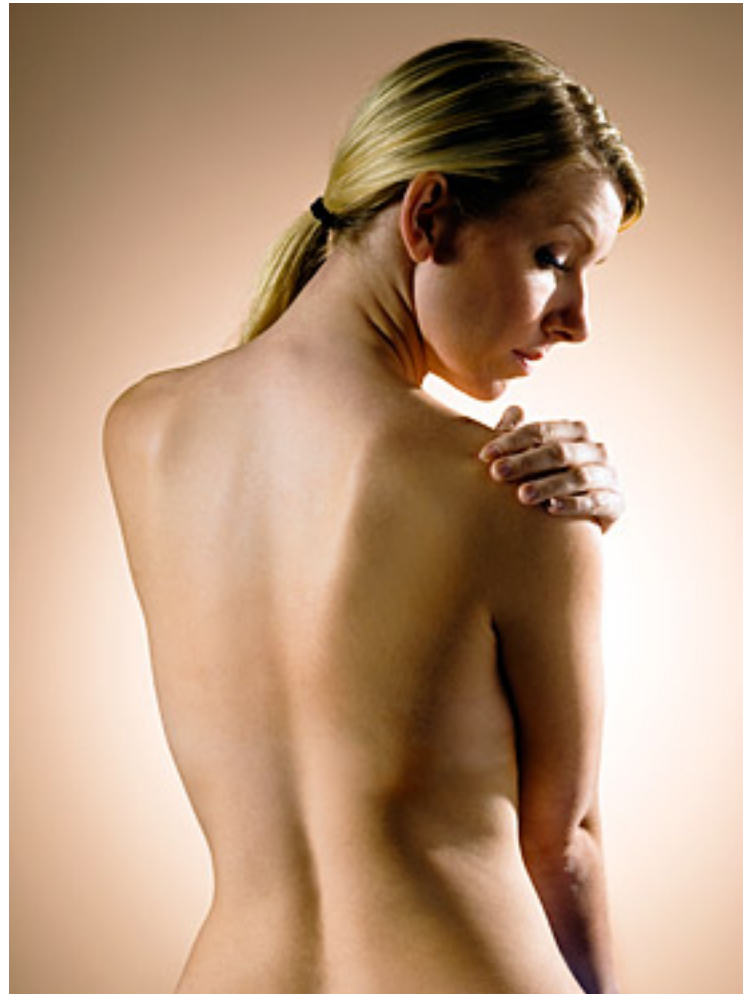
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#### What should we look for when checking our skin?

You should look for spots that are changing in size or are symptomatic, such as showing signs of itching or bleeding. If you have a sore that doesn't heal, you should get it checked out. The most important thing is a change in size or color over weeks to months.

#### How can you tell the difference between a benign mole and skin cancer?



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The only way you can totally tell the difference (between a mole and a cancer) is by removing it and looking at it in a microscope. There's a natural progression of moles-they start out flat and brown, then they turn raised and brown, then flesh color and eventually go away.

### **If you have moles, how should you record or keep track of them?**

Some people do mole mapping, which is a photograph taken over time of the mole. It's hard for people to decide what is a significant change. You kind of know when a mole doesn't look right. If you have any degree of uncertainty over a spot, you should have it looked at by a physician.

### **How often should we get a physician to do a check?**

It depends on your risk factors. If you have a family history of melanoma, have a lot of moles or have a history of skin cancer yourself, you should be seen once a year. The recommendation is to have a dermatologist check you when you turn 50. Make sure that the person looking at you is a dermatologist. It's well documented that dermatologists are better skilled in spotting these.

*Dr. Derick sees patients for both medical and aesthetic concerns at [Derick Dermatology](#), Barrington, IL. She has published several scholarly articles and delivered presentations on the national level. She has been featured as an expert in cosmetic dermatology on NBC News and publications including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, U.S. News & World Report, CNN.com, Shape Magazine, Cooking Light, Delicious Living and Woman's World.*

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