

May is recognized as Skin Cancer Awareness month by the American Cancer Society.

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer.

Melanoma is a malignant tumor of melanocytes which are found predominantly in skin but also in the bowel and the eye. It is one of the rarer types of skin cancer but causes the majority of skin cancer related deaths. Malignant melanoma is a serious type of skin cancer. It is due to uncontrolled growth of pigment cells, called melanocytes. Despite many years of intensive laboratory and clinical research, the sole effective cure is surgical resection of the primary tumor before it achieves a thickness greater than 1 mm.

Around 160,000 new cases of melanoma are diagnosed worldwide each year, and it is more frequent in males and caucasians. It is more common in caucasian populations living in sunny climates than in other groups. According to a WHO Report about 48,000 melanoma related deaths occur worldwide per year.

Malignant melanoma accounts for 75 percent of all deaths associated with skin cancer.

Often, the first sign of melanoma is a change in the size, shape, color, or feel of an existing mole. Most melanomas have a black or blue-black area. Melanoma also may appear as a new mole. It may be black, abnormal, or "ugly looking."

If you have a question or concern about something on your skin, see your doctor. Thinking of "ABCD" can help you remember what to watch for:

- Asymmetry-The shape of one half does not match the other.
- Border-The edges are often ragged, notched, blurred, or irregular in outline; the pigment may spread into the surrounding skin.
- Color-The color is uneven. Shades of black, brown, and tan may be present. Areas of white, grey, red, pink, or blue also may be seen.
- Diameter-There is a change in size, usually an increase. Melanomas are usually larger than the eraser of a pencil (1/4 inch or 5 millimeters).

Melanomas can vary greatly in how they look. Many show all of the ABCD features. However, some may show changes or abnormalities in only one or two of the ABCD features.

Melanoma can be cured if it is diagnosed and treated when the tumor is thin and has not deeply invaded the skin. However, if a melanoma is not removed at its early stages, cancer cells may grow downward from the skin surface and invade healthy tissue. When a melanoma becomes thick and deep, the disease often spreads to other parts of the body and is difficult to control. People who have had melanoma have a high risk of developing a new melanoma. People at risk for any reason should check their skin regularly and have regular skin exams by a health care provider.

Doctors recommend that people take steps **to help prevent and reduce** the risk of melanoma caused by UV radiation:

- Avoid exposure to the midday sun (from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) whenever possible. When your shadow is shorter than you are, remember to protect yourself from the sun.
- If you must be outside, wear long sleeves, long pants, and a hat with a wide brim.
- Protect yourself from UV radiation that can penetrate light clothing, windshields, and windows.
- Protect yourself from UV radiation reflected by sand, water, snow, and ice.
- Help protect your skin by using a lotion, cream, or gel that contains sunscreen. Many doctors believe sunscreens may help prevent melanoma, especially sunscreens that reflect, absorb, and/or scatter both types of ultraviolet radiation. These sunscreen products will be labeled with "broad-spectrum coverage." Sunscreens are rated in strength according to a sun

protection factor (SPF). The higher the SPF, the more sunburn protection is provided. Sunscreens with an SPF value of 2 to 11 provide minimal protection against sunburns. Sunscreens with an SPF of 12 to 29 provide moderate protection. Those with an SPF of 30 or higher provide the most protection against sunburn.

- Wear sunglasses that have UV-absorbing lenses. The label should specify that the lenses block at least 99 percent of UVA and UVB radiation. Sunglasses can protect both the eyes and the skin around the eyes.

For more information on Melanoma and other forms of skin cancer, visit the American Cancer Society's website at www.cancer.org