



## **The ABCDEs of Melanoma and Skin Self-Exam**

Melanoma is one type of skin cancer. By doing a simple skin self-exam every month, you can improve your chances of finding a melanoma early. In addition to doing routine skin self-exams, you should have your skin checked regularly by a physician. Melanoma can be anywhere on the body. Check all of your skin carefully. Melanoma is found most often on the arms and legs of women. In rare cases, it can occur in the vaginal area, therefore a woman's yearly OB/GYN exam should include checking for changes or new moles these areas. Men tend to get more melanomas on their chest, back, abdomen, and the head or neck areas. The palms of the hands, the soles of the feet and the nail beds are common areas for dark skinned people to have a melanoma. Some melanomas do not fit the rules described in this handout. It is important to tell our doctor about any changes or new spots on your skin. You should also tell your doctor about any growths that look different than the rest of your moles.

When you do your monthly skin self-exam, look for spots with any of the following:

- (A) Asymmetry: One half of the area does not match the other half.
- (B) Border: The edges are uneven or ragged.
- (C) Color: The color is not the same all over and may have more than one shade or color
- (D) Diameter: The size is larger than a pencil eraser (6 millimeters).
- (E) Evolving: The mole is changing in size, shape or color.

### **How to Check Your Skin**

After a bath or shower, stand in front of a full length mirror in a well lit room. Use a handheld mirror to look at areas that are hard to see. Begin with the face and scalp and work downward. Look at the front and back of your body in the mirror, then raise your arms and check your right and left sides. With your elbows bent, look carefully at your forearms, underarms, fingernails and palms of your hands. Check the backs of your legs, the top and bottom of your feet, toenails and between your toes. Next, using a hand mirror look at the back of your neck and scalp. Carefully check your scalp by parting your hair. Finally, use a hand mirror and check your back, groin and buttocks. By checking your skin regularly, you will know what is normal for you. You will know your skin and will be able to spot new moles or growths. If you have a significant other, check each other! Your hairdresser should also be enlisted in your monitoring program.

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