



# Mole checks – How to do it yourself!

Moving slowly towards summer, sun protection and mole checks become a hot topic again. Protecting our skin from the harmful effects of the sun is crucial to lower the risk of skin cancer.

Skin cancer is a very common type of cancer and can affect even young people. Thankfully however most cases are not life threatening and the affected skin can be removed easily, if detected early. That's why every person should keep a close eye on their skin and report any suspicious moles to their dermatologist as soon as possible.

I recommend self-examining the skin on your entire body, from top to toe, once a month. The best way to do this is when coming out of the shower. Ask a friend or family member to check your back, scalp, ears and other areas that you can't easily see yourself. Don't forget to look between your toes!

Here are some tips on how to do it and what to look out for.

## As easy as ABC

The easiest way to remember is by using the alphabet rule. This rule lists a few of the signs and symptoms that might indicate a melanoma, the deadliest form of skin cancer.

**Asymmetry** – Do the two halves of a mole differ in shape?

**Border** – Are the edges of a mole irregular or blurred? Do the outside edges of the mole show notches or look 'ragged'?

**Colour** – Is the colour uneven, patchy or is the mole showing different shades? For example you may see different shades of black, brown and pink.

**Diameter** – Is the lesion more than 5mm in diameter? Or has it changed size or become raised?

Most skin cancers can be stopped if detected early enough, so don't forget to check your skin once a month, in addition to having a full body mole check with a dermatologist once a year as a routine measure for peace of mind.

**Evolution** – Has your mole changed in any way? Has it, for example, changed in size, in shape or in colour? Or has it become itchy, is bleeding or oozing? Also, look out for other skin lesions that have appeared and won't go away (does that scaly patch or scab refuse to heal?).

**If in doubt, check it out!** – If any of the signs above is positive, make an appointment with your dermatologist as soon as possible to have it checked.

The dermatologist will examine the mole with a special magnifying lamp

called dermatoscope. With this tool, we can see the mole's pigment structure in great detail, which provides us with information as to whether the mole is harmless or may have to come out. Even if it has to come out, don't panic. The procedure is very straightforward and completely painless after numbing the skin.

**Sun safety tips** – Being sensible when out and about will help to protect your skin from sunburn and significantly reduce the risk of developing skin cancer. The following tips will help you to enjoy the sun safely.

**Seek Out Shade** – Avoid sun exposure during the middle of the day, when UV radiation levels are at their highest. If you are outdoors during these times, stay in the shade.

**Slip on protective clothing** – Cover up with clothing (ideally long sleeved shirts and trousers) and don't forget to wear a wide rimmed hat. Sunglasses provide good protection for the delicate skin around the eyes.

**Slap On Sunscreen** – Although the first two tips are most imperative, it is also important to apply sunscreen. Make sure it has an SPF (ie UVB protection factor) of 30-50. The UVA circle logo or a 5-star UVA rating gives an indication about UVA protection.

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