

Why Perform a Skin Care Self-Exam

In the early stages of skin cancer, you may be the first to spot it. According to the American Academy of Dermatology, about half of melanomas are self-detected by patients. **By performing a monthly skin check, you can advocate for your skin health and potentially save your own life.**

Performing a skin cancer self-exam can save your life and it only takes ten minutes to do at home. Let's go over the early signs of skin cancer and the steps for completing a successful self-exam.

What to Look for During a Skin Cancer Self-Exam

Skin cancers vary in appearance, which is why it's most important to look for new or unusual changes in your skin. This includes changes in moles or the appearance of new marks, patches, or growths on your skin.

If you notice any of these changes, make note (you can use our free Mole Map & Tracker on page 3), take photos, and continue to monitor them. If they don't clear up over the course of a month, consult your doctor.

Look out for:

- New moles or marks
- Moles that look different from your existing moles
- New patches that are flaky, scaly, pebbly, or rough feeling
- New areas that are red or brownish
- Changes in the size, shape, color, or texture of a mole
- Firm, flesh-colored bumps
- A sore that doesn't heal or one that itches or burns

What You'll Need to Perform a Skin Check

- Hand mirror (A hand mirror helps you examine hard-to-see places such as the back of your ears and genital areas)
- Full length mirror
- Camera or notepad
- A room with plenty of light
- A camera (or cell phone camera) to take pictures
- Ensure you have good lighting
- Use a tripod to capture hard-to-reach areas

How to Perform a Skin Cancer Self-Exam

STEP 1: CHOOSE A DAY OF THE MONTH

It's easiest to keep up with your self-exams if you maintain a routine. Pick one day out of the month, mark it on your calendar, and stick to it. Ideally, you should perform self-exams all year round. Due to potential sun exposure, you should be especially thorough during the summer months.

STEP 2: SCAN FROM HEAD TO TOE

Check for atypical moles or other irregularities on your skin. The best time to perform a self-exam is right after bathing. Bathrooms are typically well-lit, and you can use the bathroom mirror for the areas you can see easily. For areas harder to glimpse, use a handheld mirror.

Skin cancer can form anywhere, so it's important to check all your nooks and crannies. Here are some tips to examine your entire body:

Face

Start with your face. Don't forget your nose, lips, mouth and ears. For the neck and back of the ears, for example, stand with your back to the bathroom mirror and use the handheld mirror to look at your reflection over your shoulder.

Scalp

For your scalp, it might help to wet your hair and use a comb. You can also try using a blow-dryer to expose the skin and see it better. For a thorough check, ask for help from a family member, spouse, or friend.

Torso

Look at the front and back of your torso. Raise your arms and carefully check your armpits and sides, both left and right.

Upper back

Take a good look at your neck, shoulders and upper back. You can use a hand mirror to check your backside in the reflection.

Hands and arms

Check your forearms, fingernails, palms, elbows and upper arms – both front and back.

Lower back

Use the hand mirror to examine your buttocks and genital area carefully. Remember, skin cancer can form anywhere, even hard-to-reach places.

Legs and feet

Check the fronts, backs, and sides of your legs. Next, examine your feet, toenails, soles, and the space between your toes. It may help to sit down.

STEP 3: KEEP A RECORD

Record where your moles, birthmarks, and large freckles are. Note how they look and feel, and whether they show any atypical signs. Note any new growths or changes to existing moles. A camera can be especially helpful in comparing your moles from one month to the next.

STEP 4: CONSULT YOUR DOCTOR

If you notice any of these changes, be sure to record and monitor them. If these changes persist, you should schedule an appointment with your doctor.

More Skin Cancer Resources

- [How to Treat a Sunburn](#)
- [UV Rays & How the Sun Can Damage Your Skin](#)
- [Protecting Your Skin From the Sun](#)
- [Sunscreen Buying Guide: How to Choose the Right Sunscreen](#)

Normal vs. Atypical Moles

Mole Characteristics

- A Asymmetry**
One half does not match the other

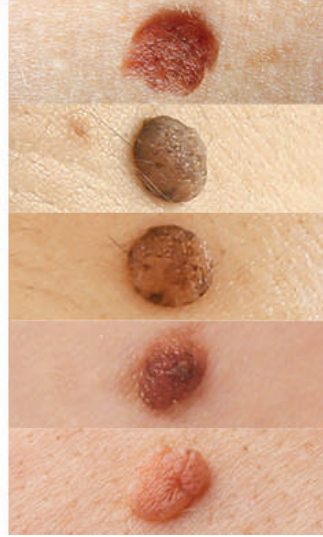
- B Border**
Edges are irregular, jagged, or blurred

- C Color**
Unevenly colored; shades of brown or black; patches of pink, red, or white

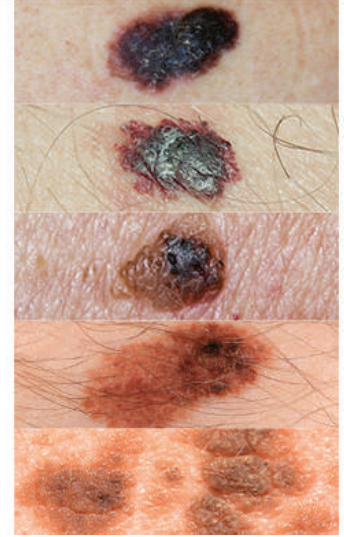
- D Diameter**
Greater than .25 inches

- E Evolving**
Changes in size, shape, or color

Normal Mole

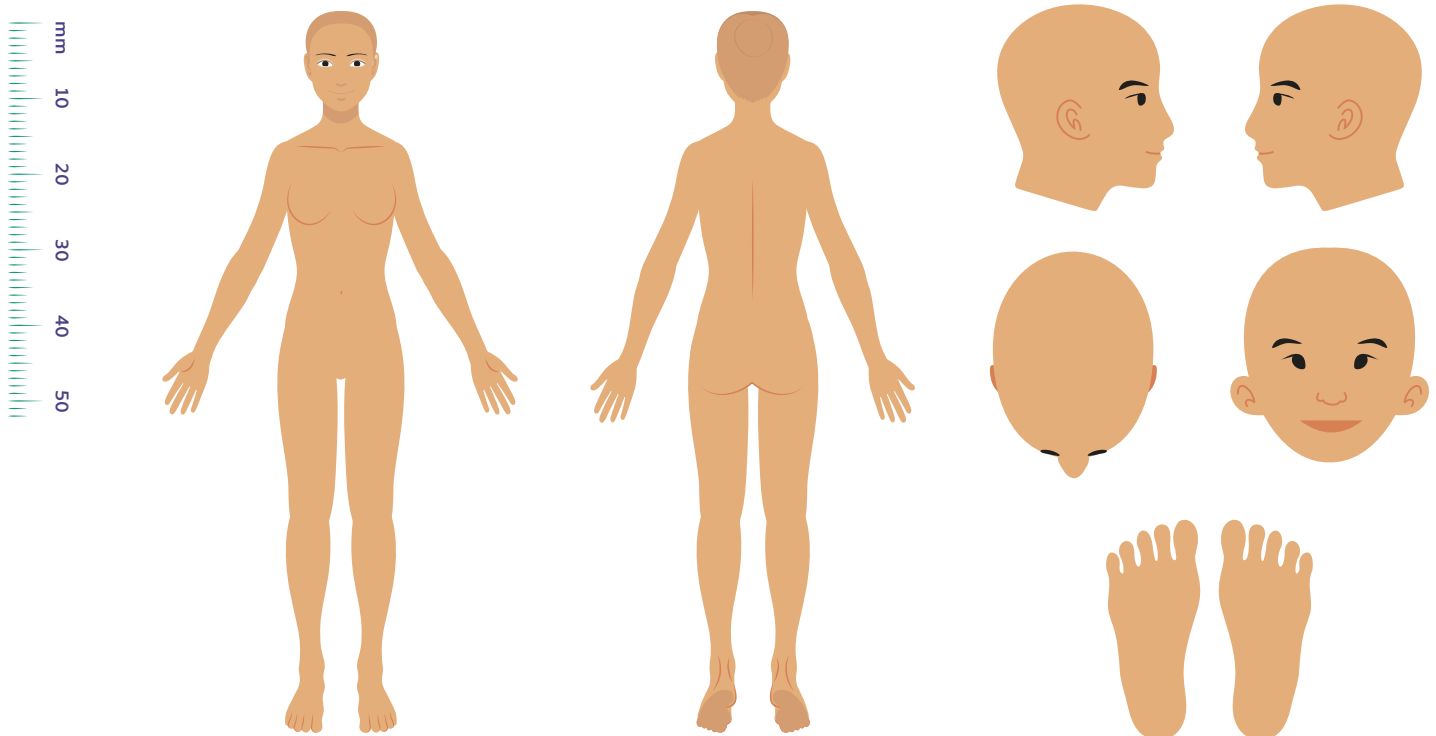


Atypical or Malignant Mole



Mole Map & Tracker

Use this section to identify where the mole is located, note its number that corresponds with the table on page 4, and measure how large it is using the ruler. Circle any areas of concern.



Track your moles using the table below, marking your observations and the date to take note of any changes over time.

Date	Mole #	Asymmetrical?	Type of Border?	Color?	Diameter?	Has This Mole Changed? How?

SERO is home to more than 30 board-certified **physicians** practicing radiation oncology out of 20 **hospitals and cancer treatment centers** around the Charlotte Metro area. Since 1977, our radiation oncologists have partnered with medical oncologists, internists, physician assistants, nurses and nutritionists to provide patients state-of-the-art care and informative resources.



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