The ABCDs of Skin Cancer

Who doesn't love to spend time playing in the sunshine? We all do! If you spend too much time in the sun, though (especially if you're not wearing sunscreen), you could be at risk for getting skin cancer. Most people think that "cancer" is a scary word. But your doctor can treat and cure most types of skin cancer, as long as you catch it early. Remember it's important to use sunscreen when you're outside, avoid the mid-day sun, cover up, and to check your skin for changes every month or two. Here's what you need to know about skin cancer, and how to give yourself a great skin exam to spot it.

The Three types of skin cancer.
These are the three most common forms of skin cancer, and looks a little different. Some are red and blotchy sores, other types look like clear bumps.

**Basal cell carcinoma.**
Basal cell carcinoma is the most common skin cancer. If you catch it early, it's very likely that your doctor can cure it.

*What it looks like.* A pearly bump that sometimes won't heal. It can also look like a sore that won't heal.

*Who could get it.* Anyone can get basal cell carcinoma, especially those people who have been out in the sun a lot.

**How it's treated.** Your dermatologist can remove a basal cell carcinoma usually with a simple office procedure.

**Squamous cell carcinoma.**
Squamous cell carcinoma is the second-most common skin cancer. It is also likely that your doctor can cure it if you find it early. But squamous cell carcinoma can spread (and some people die from it if it spreads) if you don't treat it early.

*What it looks like.* A crusty, scaly patch with a hard surface.

*Who could get it.* Anyone can get squamous cell carcinoma, especially those people who have been out in the sun a lot.

**How it's treated.** Your dermatologist can remove this kind of skin cancer usually with a simple office procedure.

**Melanoma.**
Although melanoma is the least common type of skin cancer, it is the most dangerous. People can die from melanoma. If you have a family history of this skin cancer, you could get it even if you've never been out in the sun.

*What it looks like.* Usually a dark mole, sometimes with an uneven edge. The color and size may change as time passes.

*Who could get it.* Anyone. Especially those with fair skin, people who have had
lots of blistering sunburns when they were kids, or people with a family history of melanoma.

**How it's treated.** A dermatologist cuts the cancer out of your skin. (If the cancer is caught early, the dermatologist will need to cut away less skin.) If the cancer has spread, you may need other treatments, too.

**The perfect skin exam.**
We know that finding skin changes early can help dermatologists cure skin cancer. One way to keep track of skin changes is to give yourself an exam every couple of months. You'll want to look for growing, bleeding, crusting, or other changing spots on your skin. (If you see these or other unusual skin changes, see your dermatologist as soon as possible. But don't worry. The changes don't always mean skin cancer.)

Sometimes it's easier to do a good skin exam if you have someone with you (they can see places on your body that you can't see). *Whether you have someone help you or not, though, it's easy to do a skin self-exam if you follow these steps.*

**You'll need:**
- a full-length mirror
- a hand-held mirror

Without any mirror, check:
- the tops of your feet and between toes
- your palms and your hands

In the full-length mirror, check:
- where your hair parts, your face, neck, chest, underarms, elbows, belly, and the fronts of your legs

With the full-length and hand-held mirror (or with someone's help), check:
- your back, the back of your neck, legs, and your buttocks

With just the hand-held mirror, check:
- the soles of your feet
- your genital area

**Checking your skin is as easy as A-B-C-D!**
It's easy to check your skin if you know what to look for. If you find any of the changes listed below while you're doing your skin exam, see a dermatologist.
A symmetry - one half unlike the other half.

B order irregular - scalloped or poorly circumscribed border.

Color varied from one area to another; shades of tan and brown; black; sometimes white, red or blue.

Diameter larger than 6mm as a rule (diameter of a pencil eraser).

Are you at risk?
Some people get skin cancer even if they've never spent time in the sun. You need to be especially careful to check your skin if you:

- have light hair and skin
- freckle and burn easily
- have a family member who's had skin cancer
- spent a lot of time in the sun throughout your life
- had blistering sunburns as a youngster
- have blue, green or gray eyes