Skin Self Examination

Skin cancer is the most common of all cancers, afflicting more than two million Americans each year, a number that is rising rapidly. It is also the easiest to cure if diagnosed and treated early. When allowed to progress, however, skin cancer can result in disfigurement and even death.

The Skin Cancer Foundation recommends practicing monthly head-to-toe skin self-examination so that you can become familiar with what’s normal for you and detect any new or changing lesions that might be cancerous or precancerous. Skin cancers found and removed early are almost always curable. Learn about the warning signs of skin cancer, check for anything new such as a change in the size, texture, or color of a mole, or a sore that doesn’t heal. If you spot anything suspicious, see a doctor.

Performed regularly, self-examination can alert you to changes in your skin and aid in the early detection of skin cancer. It should be done often enough to become a habit, but not so often as to feel like a bother. For most people, once a month is ideal, but ask your doctor if you should do more frequent checks.

1. Examine your face, especially the nose, lips, mouth, and ears - front and back. Use one or two mirrors to get a clear view.

2. Thoroughly inspect your scalp, using a blow dryer and mirror to expose each section to view. Get a friend or family member to help, if you can.

3. Check your hands carefully: palms and backs, between the fingers and under the fingernails. Continue up the wrists to examine both front and back of your forearms.
4 Standing in front of the full-length mirror, begin at the elbows and scan all sides of your upper arms. Don't forget the underarms.

5 Next focus on the neck, chest, and torso. Women should lift breasts to view the underside.

6 With your back to a full-length mirror, use a hand mirror to inspect the back of your neck, shoulders, upper back, and any part of the back of your upper arms you could not view in step 4.

7 Still using both mirrors, scan your lower back, buttocks, and backs of both legs.

8 Sit down; prop each leg in turn on the other stool or chair. Use the hand mirror to examine the genitals. Check front and sides of both legs, thigh to shin, ankles, tops of feet, between toes and under toenails. Examine soles of feet and heels.

Reference: