What does a melanoma look like? [1]

Alice?

What does a melanoma look like?

Signed,
Sunny

Answer

Dear Sunny,

Melanoma can have many faces and it's important to know what to look for considering it's the most deadly type of skin cancer. While most melanomas and other skin cancers appear in existing moles, some appear as new skin growths. Melanomas usually appear in areas that are exposed to the sun (face, arms, legs, etc.). Yet, they can occur anywhere including the mouth, scalp, genitals, soles of the feet, palms, and between the toes.

The Skin Cancer Foundation [2] suggests using an easy-to-remember A-B-C-D-E skin self-exam guide for inspecting moles and new skin growths for the possibility of skin cancer:

- **A** ? The mole or skin growth has an **asymmetrical** shape.
- **B** ? The **border** of the mole or skin growth is irregular ? notched or scalloped.
- **C** ? The **color** of the mole or skin growth has an uneven color or several colors.
- **D** ? The **diameter** of the mole of skin growth is larger than 1/4 inch.
- **E** ? The mole or skin growth is **evolving** in size, shape, or color

Also, keep in mind that tissue invaded by melanoma may also itch, burn, ooze, or bleed easily. If you notice any of these signs on your skin, you should see a health care provider or dermatologist as soon as possible. If you're a student, your school's student health services should be able to direct you.

While melanoma does not discriminate, a few personal characteristics and situational factors can put individuals at increased risk. People are particularly likely to develop melanoma if they have:

- Fair skin
- A family history of melanoma
- A personal history of sunburn
• A heavy amount of exposure to the sun
• Many moles
• A weakened immune system

Do any of those things apply to you? If so, you might consider getting regular skin exams. In fact, the American Cancer Society suggests people between 20 and 30 years of age get FULL body checks every 3 years. For people over 40 years of age, and people with lots of risk factors or a previous history of some skin cancer, it's smart to get this done yearly.

It's a really good idea to know the signs and symptoms of melanoma because when found early it's one of the most treatable types of cancer. Whenever you have a question about a mole or possible melanoma, it's recommended that you make a visit to your health care provider. And in the mean time, take precautions like wearing sunscreen and staying in shady areas during any outdoor activities.

Alice!
Category:
General Health
Cancer
Skin Conditions

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Resources

Medical Services (Morningside)
Medical Services (CUMC)
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