Written by meg sibal, m.d. Sunday, 26 June 2016 16:33



SUMMER is upon us once again, reminding us of the urgent need for sun protection, regular skin self-exams and doctor visits which can help us catch melanoma and other skin cancers before they progress, says the Cleveland Clinic Men's Health Advisor.

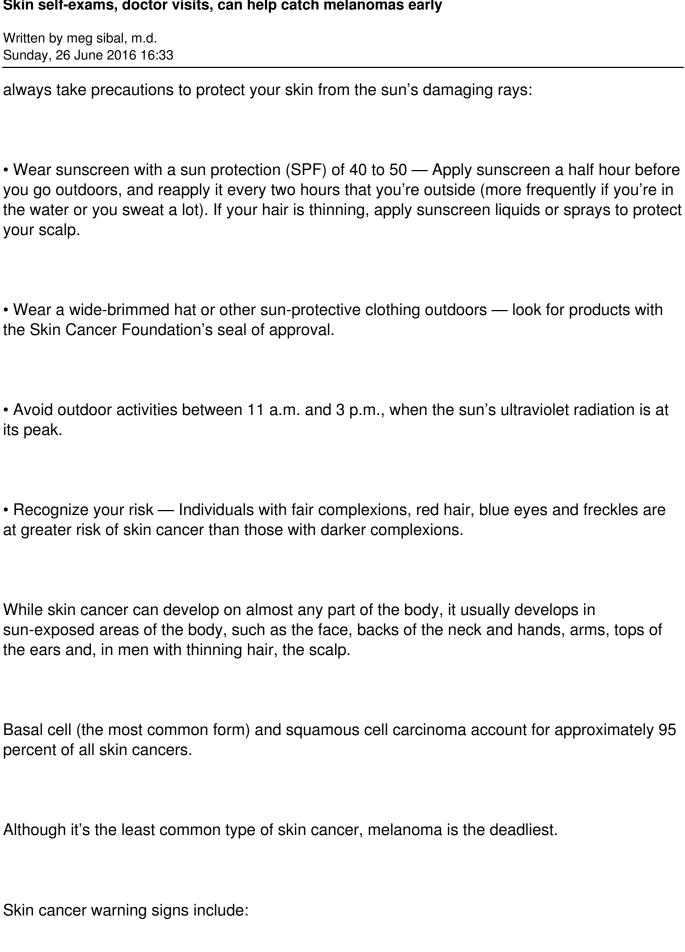
Using full-length and handheld mirrors, a full-body check is a ritual that you and all men should do periodically to search for skin cancer.

Yet, research suggests that even individuals with a history of melanoma skin cancer fail to perform these regular skin self-exams — this is particularly troubling, as rates of melanoma in men over age 60 are twice as high as those in women, and three times as high in men ages 80 and older, according to the American Cancer Society.

"Even in patients with a history of skin cancer, we definitely see a failure to look at their skin," says Alok Vij, M.D., with Cleveland Clinic's Department of Dermatology.

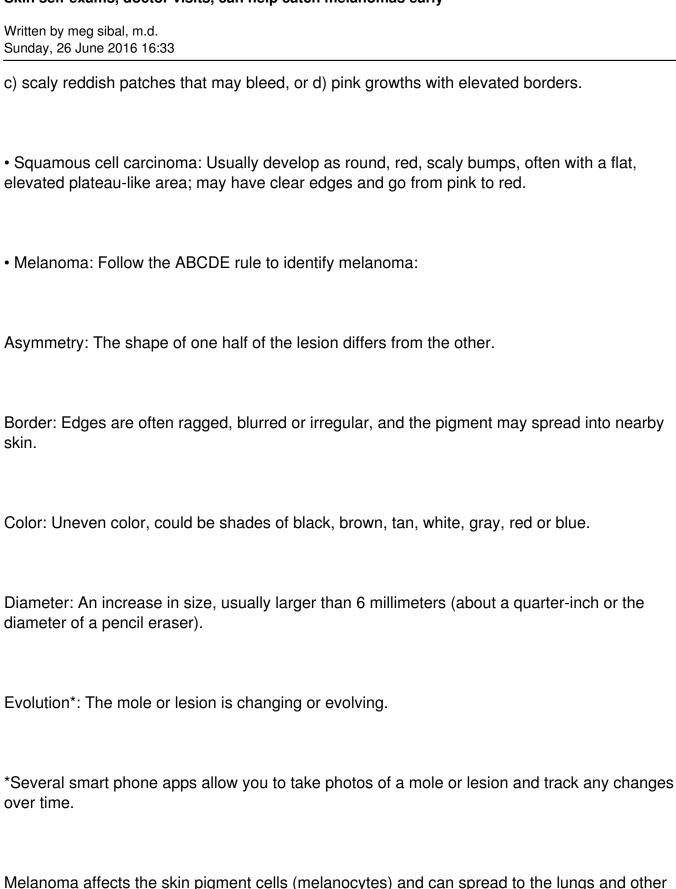
"The most important thing with all types of skin cancer is that the earlier you catch it, the easier it is in terms of treatment and the more likely that we'll get a cure."

Aside from keeping an eye on your skin and having your doctor check you for skin cancer,



• Basal cell carcinoma: May form as a) pearly bumps with visible blood vessels, b) open sores,

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Once it spreads, melanoma is difficult to treat — so it is critical to identify it and remove it early.

organs, where it can be deadly.

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However, a study published in the February issue of Melanoma Research found that many individuals who have had melanoma aren't adequately checking their skin for the cancer — in the study, nearly three quarters of 176 adults with a history of melanoma said they had performed a self-exam in the past two months, but only one in seven had thoroughly examined all their skin.

"About 50 percent of the time, patients are the ones who catch their melanomas. The patients are the ones who can catch it earlier," Dr. Vij says.

"It's disappointing because whenever we see patients with a history of skin cancer, we try to educate them about the importance of catching it early with good self-examinations."

Dr. Vij advises performing a skin self-exam once every month or two: In a quiet, well-lit room, remove your clothing and inspect all areas of your body, using a full-length mirror and a handheld mirror.

Recruit your spouse or partner to help you check difficult-to-see areas, such as your scalp or back.

Dr. Vij says that generally, people who have a total body count of more than 50 to 100 moles are at greater risk of melanoma (melanoma originates in the clumps of melanocytes you know as moles).

A study published in February in the British Journal of Dermatology found that having more than 11 moles on one arm correlated with a total mole count of more than 100.

"A simple count of one extremity gives you an idea of what's happening on the rest of your body," says Dr. Vij.

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"It's an easy screening tool that a patient or a family practitioner can use to determine whether a patient might be at elevated risk and should be sent to a dermatologist."

If you haven't already, have a baseline skin evaluation by a dermatologist, as well as periodic checks by your primary care physician.

You should see a dermatologist more frequently if: a) you're fair-skinned, b) you have a high sun exposure, and c) you have a history of precancerous skin lesions or skin cancer.

Dr. Vij concludes, "It takes maybe 5 to 10 minutes to look at all your skin — it's an easy thing to do at home once a month, and if it prevents a doctor from coming close to your face with a scalpel to remove a skin cancer, it's worth it."