



Adult Dermatology General Skin Monitoring Advice

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General Skin Monitoring Advice¹

We recommend doing a self-check of your skin every 3-4 months. If you notice any new or changing skin lesions to see your GP who can assess you and consider re-referring you. Changes to look for include:

- Asymmetry – the two halves of the area may differ in shape
- Border – the edges of the area may be irregular or blurred, and sometimes show notches
- Colour – this may be uneven. Different shades of black, brown and pink may be seen
- Diameter – melanomas will progressively change. If you see any mole, or ‘mole-like’ mark getting bigger over a period of weeks to months, tell your doctor.
- Expert – if in doubt, check it out!

How do I monitor my skin?

The best way to check your skin lesions is to carry out regular skin self-examinations (SSE). Early detection can help to reduce the risk of developing a larger, more serious skin cancer that may need extensive surgery or treatment. You should be looking for:

- New skin lumps, spots, ulcers, scaly patches or moles that weren't there before
- Marks (including moles) on the skin that have changed shape, colour, texture or size
- Sores that do not heal
- Any areas on the skin that are itchy, painful or bleed

How to examine your skin

Ideally you should examine your skin in a warm, well-lit room with the following equipment:

- A chair
- A full-length mirror
- A hand-held mirror
- A comb
- A tape measure or ruler
- A digital camera to record any skin marks you are not sure about

To make sure that you check all your skin, we suggest you examine yourself from head to toe following these steps. Use a mirror to check difficult-to-see areas or ask a friend or relative to help you.

Head

Beginning with your head, examine your scalp using a comb to part your hair so you can check all over your scalp. Go on to look over your face and neck. Don't forget to check behind your ears and the back of your neck.

Upper body

Check your shoulders, chest and abdomen, again using a comb to part any hair to examine the skin underneath. Don't forget to examine under your breasts and in the groin area.

¹ Information adapted from <https://www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/symptoms-treatments/skin-cancer/>

Arms and hands

Examine each arm in turn beginning with the hands. Look at both the front and back of your hands and check between your fingers (the web spaces) and your fingernails. Examine all around your upper and lower arms (remember to use a mirror for places you can't see) and raise your arms above your head to check each armpit.

Back

If you have someone who can look at your back for you that is the easiest method of examination. If you want to do it yourself, use a full-length mirror in conjunction with a hand-held mirror. Look at the whole of your back starting at the top. Examine both shoulders to the middle of your back. Working from each side to the middle, traversing your back as you go, move down past your hips to your bottom.

Legs and feet

Sit down to examine the front and sides of your upper and lower legs. Remember to look at your groin area including the genitals. Look at your feet, paying particular attention to the soles and between your toes. Remember to check your toenails. Don't forget to record what you find and write down the date you noticed it.

What to do if you have any concerns?

If you notice any new or changing skin lesions please make an appointment with your GP. If your GP is concerned about your skin, they will refer you to a dermatology department for further assessment. As skin cancers vary, you should tell your doctor about any changes to your skin, even if they are not similar to those mentioned here.

Where can you find further information?

Useful websites for further information regarding self-monitoring, sun protection and skin cancer include: (please copy and paste into your internet browser if the link does not work)

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/moles>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/melanoma-skin-cancer/>

<http://www.britishskinfoundation.org.uk/>

<https://www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/>

<https://www.pcds.org.uk/self-examination-of-moles>

Sun advice is also available at:

<https://www.skinhealthinfo.org.uk/sun-awareness/the-sunscreen-fact-sheet/>

