

# Melanoma & Skin Cancer Awareness

## Tips to Help Keep Your Health On Track!

### Why Melanoma & Skin Cancer Awareness is Important

Skin cancer is the most common form of cancer in the U.S., with more new cases diagnosed each year than the incidences of breast, prostate, lung, and colon cancers combined. Melanoma is the most dangerous form of skin cancer<sup>(1)</sup> – one person dies of melanoma every hour, and one in fifty-five people will be diagnosed with this form of skin cancer in their lifetime.<sup>(2)</sup> While melanoma accounts for less than 5% of all skin cancer cases, it results in more than 75% of all cancer deaths. However, if melanoma is detected and treated before significant penetration of the skin occurs, the survival rate is 99%.

### How Can Melanoma Be Avoided?<sup>(3)</sup>

Melanoma is caused primarily by exposure to UV rays from the sun. It begins in a type of skin cell called a melanocyte which produces the skin pigment known as melanin. Melanin is responsible for our natural skin color and, when exposed to the sun, is produced in large amounts as part of the tanning process to help protect our skin from burning. To minimize your risk of developing melanoma:

- Avoid exposure to the sun and protect your skin during the hours of the day when the sun's rays are the strongest – between 10:00 AM and 3:00 PM.
- Avoid significant tanning either from the sun or tanning salons.
- Protect your skin using sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15 or higher (even in winter) and by wearing appropriate clothing – wide-brimmed hats, long-sleeved shirts, pants, etc.
- Use special sunscreens for babies and children with even higher SPFs; studies have shown that one or more blistering sunburns during childhood may be a significant risk factor in developing melanoma later in life.<sup>(1)</sup>

### Who is at Risk?<sup>(3)</sup>

- People with fair skin, especially those with red or blond hair, are more at risk because their skin cells have less melanin than darker-skinned people.
- White males over age 50 represent the majority of people diagnosed with melanoma.
- Darker-skinned people must also be careful – their risk is often overlooked, leading to a late stage diagnosis.
- Nearly 800,000 Americans are living with a history of melanoma and about 13 million are living with other forms of skin cancer.

### How to Spot Potential Melanoma

Early detection and treatment are critical to improving the likelihood of surviving melanoma. As a result, everyone should examine their skin carefully, especially moles and markings, every six to eight weeks because melanoma can either appear quickly or develop slowly from an existing mole. Look for any changes in the number, size, shape or color. For men, they are usually located on the torso, head, and neck area, and for women, they will often develop on the lower legs and torso. The best approach to spotting melanoma is to learn the simple ABCD approach as a useful guide when examining your moles or lesions:

<b>A = Asymmetry:</b> Melanoma lesions are generally irregular or lopsided in shape (asymmetrical); noncancerous lesions are usually rounded (symmetrical).	<b>B = Border:</b> Melanoma lesions usually have irregular borders that are ragged or notched; noncancerous lesions will generally have smoother, even borders.
<b>C = Color:</b> Melanoma lesions often consist of many shades of black and brown; noncancerous lesions will usually be a single shade of brown.	<b>D = Diameter:</b> Melanoma lesions are usually more than ¼ inch or 6 millimeters in diameter, which is about the size of a pencil eraser; noncancerous lesions will typically be less than this size in diameter.

### Get Your Doctor Involved

Contact your doctor as soon as possible if you notice any unusual or odd-looking lesions, moles or markings. Your doctor will do a thorough examination of all of your moles and skin markings, and help you to assess your risk based on your medical history. If your doctor suspects any of them could be cancerous, a biopsy may be performed. Remember that both early detection and treatment are key actions to take to minimize the effects of melanoma.

(1) Cancer Research Institute; (2) American Cancer Society; (3) The Skin Cancer Foundation

This information is intended as informational only; not as a replacement for the medical advice of your physician.