

Ask The Doctor

Q. Should I be screened for skin cancer?

A. Regular examination of your skin by both you and your doctor increases the chance of finding skin cancer early, when it is most treatable. The American Cancer Society recommends a complete skin examination every year for people over age 40 and every three years for ages 20-39.

Those at highest risk should have frequent and thorough skin exams. These include people who have red hair, fair skin, and burn or freckle easily, especially if they are over age 65; people with atypical moles; and people with many or large moles.

Current estimates are that one in five Americans will develop skin cancer in their lifetime. Skin cancer is the most common of all cancers, and the biggest risk factor is too much sun. **The skin is your body's largest organ, and bears the brunt of the sun's damaging UV radiation.** Particularly hard hit is the epidermis, or top layer, where skin cancer begins.

Most skin cancers are basal cell and squamous cell cancers. These will account for more than one million cases of skin cancer in the U.S. this year. Because they rarely spread to the rest of the body, they are easily treatable if found early.

Less common but more serious is melanoma, which makes up about five percent of all skin cancer diagnoses and 75 percent of all skin cancer deaths. **All three types of skin cancer are on the rise, but melanoma is the fastest-growing cancer in**



James Stewart, MD
Dermatologist
Dermatology Clinic of Idaho

the U.S., doubling in the past 20 years. It is often curable if caught early, but if left untreated it can spread and become fatal. In 2008, 8,420 people died of melanoma.

Most skin cancer is preventable by avoiding unprotected sun exposure, especially between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.; covering up with sunglasses, broad-brimmed hats, and tightly-woven protective clothing; using sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays; and avoiding the use of tanning beds.

The most common warning sign of skin cancer is a change in the appearance of the skin, such as a new growth or a sore that will not heal. Get regular checkups, and tell your doctor immediately if you detect a suspicious-looking mole or patch on your skin.

Free Skin Cancer Screening

St. Luke's MSTI
Saturday, May 16
8am-noon
100 E. Idaho in Boise

Call 381-9000 or visit stlukesonline.org for an appointment.

Brought to you by St. Luke's and local physicians, to address new medical procedures and timely health-related topics.

For physician referral, call 381-9000 or visit www.stlukesonline.org.