

Skin Cancer Screening

Why is screening important?

It is imperative to diagnose skin cancer early. This is true for all forms of skin cancer, but especially so for melanoma.

What sort of screening is appropriate?

All patients should have some form of regular skin screening. Those at relatively low risk may simply self screen aided by their partner and then have their GP examine any spot which is new, changing or growing. Those at higher risk should be checked by their GP every 1 to 2 years. Those at highest risk should be seen regularly by a Dermatologist.

How do I Assess My Risk?

In general your risk may be assessed as follows.

Low risk:

No personal or family history of skin cancer and with minimal sun exposure

Medium risk:

Personal history of or strong family history of skin cancer, or significant history sun exposure

High risk:

Significant personal and or family history of skin cancer, especially of melanoma

For a more in depth assessment of melanoma risk, see the questionnaire on the Skin Search web site. (currently under construction)

How is screening performed?

Screening is usually performed solely with the naked eye, though individual suspicious lesions may be examined with additional lighting, magnification or with a dermatoscope. Patients either large number of skin lesions, especially with a large total mole count are frequently monitored with serial photography, enabling comparison of lesions from one time to the next.

New technology, enables tracking of lesions with both serial photography and serial dermoscopy. Revolutionary software also detects new lesions that may be missed with the naked eye. This sort of technology is particularly helpful in the detection of early melanoma in high risk patients with large numbers of moles in whom naked eye assessment is notoriously difficult.

Remember:

Regardless of whether regular screening is being performed or not if you detect a changing or newly developing skin lesion, or if you become concerned about any particular skin lesion, ensure that you have it checked by your doctor.

Further reading:

Dermoscopy

Melanoma