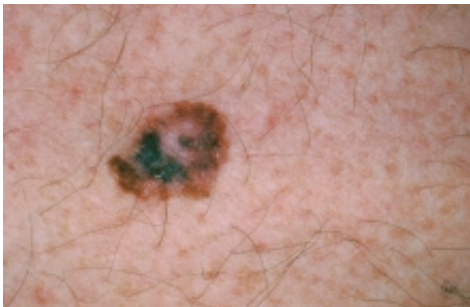


# When it comes to skin cancer, pictures are worth 1,000 words

August 1 2013

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Seeing pictures of skin cancer motivates people to regularly check their own moles, according to a new research paper from the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo.

The paper, published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, found that visual images of skin cancer are most effective in prompting skin self-examinations.

"Visual images capture our attention and are persuasive. They also help us to learn and remember," said Professor Laurie Hoffman-Goetz, of the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences and co-author on the paper. The systematic review found that exposure to images of skin cancer motivated people to check their skin more frequently and accurately. The study found that providing text descriptions alone were not effective

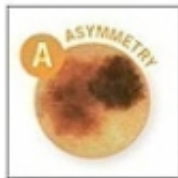
in aiding skin self-examination.

"Images motivate health behaviours in ways text does not," said Jennifer McWhirter, a PhD candidate funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and co-author on the paper.

The paper's findings could help inform patient education strategies and public health communication efforts.

"Skin self-examination plays an important role in detecting melanoma early. Many cases of melanoma are first detected by patients themselves," said McWhirter.

## What to look for: The ABCDEs of melanoma



**A = Asymmetry**  
One half is unlike the other half.



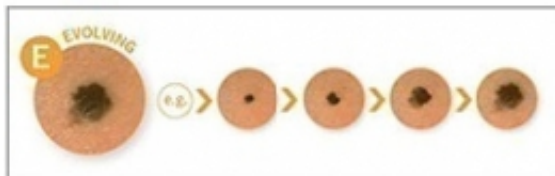
**B = Border**  
An irregular, scalloped or poorly defined border.



**C = Color**  
Is varied from one area to another; has shades of tan, brown or black, or is sometimes white, red, or blue.



**D = Diameter**  
Melanomas are usually greater than 6mm (the size of a pencil eraser) when diagnosed, but they can be smaller.



**E = Evolving**  
A mole or skin lesion that looks different from the rest or is changing in size, shape or color.

*Source: The American Academy of Dermatology*

"Incorporating [images](#) into clinical practice when educating patients can be a powerful tool in the fight against skin cancer." said Professor Hoffman-Goetz.

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in North America. In Canada, there are expected to be 6,000 new cases of melanoma—the

most dangerous kind of skin cancer - and more than 81,000 cases of non-melanoma [skin cancer](#) this year alone.

**More information:** Information on the early detection of skin cancer, including skin self-examination with example images, can be accessed through the American Academy of Dermatology [website](#).

Provided by University of Waterloo

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