

Too many Americans neglect backs in skin cancer prevention

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Survey by dermatologists' group finds many people don't use sunscreen on this area, or check it for cancer.

(HealthDay)—A new survey finds that many people in the United States are forgetting their backs when they try to be forward-thinking about skin cancer prevention.

Experts at the American Academy of Dermatology, which sponsored the survey, note that the back is a common site for melanoma, a potentially deadly skin cancer.

However, of the more than 1,000 Americans polled, over a third said they rarely or never apply [sunscreen](#) to their backs when they're in the sun. Almost half (43 percent) also said that they never or rarely ask anyone to assist applying sunscreen to their backs.

Men weren't as willing as women to apply sunscreen to their backs or ask someone else for help, and they were twice as likely to be uncomfortable about the whole idea. Overall, 40 percent of men and 33 percent of women surveyed said they rarely or never apply sunscreen to their backs.

One expert said he wasn't surprised by the finding.

"It is important to apply sunscreen not only to our fronts, but also to our backs regularly," said Dr. Joshua Zeichner, assistant professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, in New York City.

"We also need to encourage our friends and family members to do the same," he said.

The poll also found that too few Americans are checking their backs for signs of skin cancer. More than half (57 percent) said they know how to do a self-check (women were more likely than men to understand the procedure), but only half inspect themselves at least once a year.

Only 36 percent of those surveyed check their backs for skin cancer at least once a year, and only 35 percent ask someone else to help, the survey found.

"We need to take charge of our own health and monitor our skin for new or changing spots," Zeichner said, because "the best way to cure skin cancer is early detection."

Another expert agreed.

"It is incredibly important for patients to be educated on the simple ways to check one's skin for signs of skin cancer, and to perform these self-examinations frequently, as well as to schedule regular visits with a

dermatologist to check all those 'hard-to-reach' or 'hard-to-see' places," said Dr. Katy Burris, a dermatologist with the North Shore-LIJ Health System in Manhasset, N.Y.

And, "while many people may feel uncomfortable asking someone else to apply sunscreen to their back, hopefully as the public becomes more educated on the dangers of skin cancer and benefits of sunscreen, the importance of these actions will outweigh the potential barrier of simply asking for help," she added.

According to the American Cancer Society, skin cancer is one of the most common malignancies, with more than 3.5 million cases of basal and squamous cell skin cancer diagnosed in the United States each year. Another 73,000 cases of the most deadly form of [skin cancer](#), melanoma, are diagnosed annually.

More information: Find out more about skin cancer at the [American Cancer Society](#).

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