

Many skin cancer patients skip routine self-exams

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Study finds some don't know how to spot signs of trouble.

(HealthDay)—Many people who've had melanoma skin cancer don't regularly check their skin for new or recurring signs of cancer, a new study reveals.

Routine skin self-exams are critical to ensure the early detection of new or recurring [skin cancer](#), but the study found that fewer than 15 percent of melanoma patients consistently perform thorough skin self-exams.

"The most common reasons given for not having conducted such an exam over the prior two-month period were that patients didn't think of it, didn't know what to look for, or didn't know that they should," the study's lead author, Elliot Coups, a behavioral scientist at Rutgers Cancer Institute of New Jersey, said in an institute news release.

The study included 176 people who'd had [malignant melanoma](#), the most serious form of skin cancer. More than half of the study volunteers were women, and 99 percent were white, the researchers said. The average age was 62.

Study participants completed a survey about their skin self-examination habits. The survey also asked about their willingness to perform thorough exams.

Researchers found that 72 percent of the participants had done a skin self-exam within the past two months. But only 14 percent looked at every part of their body. Only 13 percent said they always used a full-length mirror to conduct their body exam. And 11 percent reported using a hand-held mirror. Meanwhile, just 9 percent said they recruited another person to help them examine their skin.

Some of those who didn't perform a self-exam said they relied on their doctor to perform a complete skin exam.

People with a higher level of education and those with more knowledge about how to detect melanoma were more likely to conduct regular, thorough skin self-exams, the researchers found.

One warning sign is a change in the size, color or shape of a mole. Moles that are oddly shaped, have an irregular border or a large diameter (bigger than a pencil eraser) are also cause for concern, the American Cancer Society says.

Few patients seem to know how to do skin exams well or how to use tools, such as mirrors, to ensure they can find and track suspicious-looking moles, the researchers noted. They said their findings suggest a need for programs to help [melanoma](#) patients learn how to conduct a thorough skin exam and spot the warning signs of skin cancer.

More information: The American Academy of Dermatology provides more about [melanoma](#).

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