

One key question can help spot skin cancer

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(HealthDay)—When a suspicious skin lesion sends you scurrying to a dermatologist, asking for a full-body skin check could save your life.

Dermatologists are twice as likely to find skin cancer with a full-body check, a new study reveals. More than half of the [skin cancers](#) discovered were not in the location the patient was concerned about.

"If the [dermatologist](#) did not check their entire body, these skin cancers would be missed," said lead author Dr. Murad Alam. He is vice chair of dermatology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, in Chicago.

His team reviewed the [medical records](#) of more than 1,000 patients for the study, which is scheduled for publication in September in the *International Journal of Women's Dermatology*.

The skin cancers discovered during full-body skin exams included basal cell carcinomas, squamous cell carcinomas and life-threatening melanomas.

"The bottom line is everyone with a risk of skin cancer or a suspicious skin lesion should have a complete skin exam because this is the best way to find skin cancers," Alam said. "This practice can save many lives."

Skin cancers, the most common cancers in the United States, can be treated successfully if found early. About 5 million people in the United States are diagnosed with skin cancer each year.

Anyone at risk for skin cancer due to fair skin, a history of sun exposure or other [risk factors](#) should have routine full-body skin exams, experts say.

"This study shows the importance of a complete skin exam, also called a full-body skin exam, for finding [skin](#) cancer," Alam said in a Northwestern news release. "Dermatologists need to take the opportunity

to look over the patient's entire body, even when the appointment is just for a suspicious lesion. And patients need to request one in case the doctor doesn't suggest it."

More information: The American Cancer Society has some [skin cancer facts](#).

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