How can I spot skin cancer early myself?

A guide to examining your own skin

This guide helps you recognise suspicious skin changes early. It does not replace a medical examination – it complements it.

Why self-examination matters

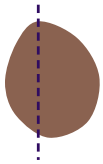
Many skin cancers are first noticed by patients themselves or by family members – often while applying cream, showering or getting dressed. Regular, attentive self-examination can help you show noticeable changes to a doctor early.

How often should I check?

Look at your entire skin from head to toe once a month – ideally on the same day each month, for example the first. Depending on your personal risk (e.g. many moles, fair skin, past sunburns, skin cancer in the family), a full-body examination by a dermatologist once a year is also advisable.

1 What to look for

The ABCDE rule: a first orientation – This rule helps, but it is not perfect: some harmless moles meet individual criteria without being dangerous. It is a first, rough assessment.



A

Asymmetry

One half of the spot looks different from the other.



B

Border

The edge is blurred, jagged or poorly defined.



C

Colour

Several colours in one spot, e.g. brown, black, red, white, blue.



D

Diameter

Larger than 6 mm – about the size of a pencil eraser.



E

Evolving

The spot changes in size, shape, colour or height.



The “ugly duckling” sign

Most of a person’s moles look similar to each other (a “family pattern”). A mole that clearly stands out from this pattern deserves special attention – even if it does not fully meet the ABCDE criteria. This sign is often more reliable than ABCDE alone, especially in people with many moles.

Dermetrics – Dr. med. Paul Georg · Clinic Selnau · Brandschenkestrasse 45 · 8002 Zurich
Book an appointment: +41 43 234 55 55 · dermetrics.ch

This guide is general patient information and does not replace individual medical advice. Factual information in accordance with the FMH code of conduct.



The EFG rule

Some dangerous skin changes (nodular melanomas) are single-coloured, symmetrical and smaller than 6 mm – easy to miss with ABCDE. Warning signs regardless of colour or symmetry:

E Elevated
raised noticeably above the skin surface

F Firm
feels hard or firm to the touch

G Growing
has grown steadily for more than a month

2 How to examine your skin

In a well-lit room in front of a large mirror, with a hand mirror for hard-to-see areas. A second person can help with your back and scalp.

1 **Head and neck**
Face, ears (also behind them), neck and scalp – part your hair with a comb or hairdryer.

2 **Hands**
Palms, backs of the hands, between the fingers, under the fingernails.

3 **Arms**
From the wrists up to the shoulders, including the armpits.

4 **Upper body**
Chest and abdomen, for women also under the breasts.

5 **Back**
Back, nape of the neck and buttocks – use a mirror or ask for help.

6 **Legs**
Front and back, from the thighs down to the feet.

7 **Feet**
Soles, between the toes, under the toenails.

8 **Genital area**
Include this area in your check as well.

Tip: A photo of your skin, e.g. with your smartphone, helps you compare changes over time.

Other warning signs – always have them checked

- A wound or spot that does not heal within about four weeks
- Itching, tenderness or bleeding without an obvious cause
- A new reddish, scaly or crusty patch that does not go away
- A change in existing moles, freckles or scars
- A newly swollen lymph node area (e.g. armpit, groin, neck) if you have had skin cancer before

What to do if something looks unusual

Any new or changing spot showing one of these warning signs should be shown to a dermatologist promptly. It is better to have a harmless spot checked once too often than to miss a serious change. The final assessment – including dermoscopy – belongs in the hands of a specialist.

Don't forget sun protection

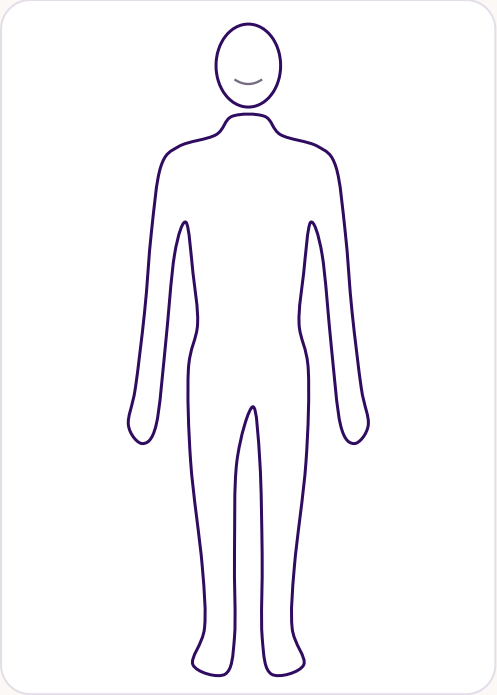
Regular sun protection – sunscreen with an adequate sun protection factor, protective clothing, avoiding the midday sun, no sunbeds – lowers the risk of skin cancer and complements self-examination.

Dermetrics – Dr. med. Paul Georg · Clinic Selnau · Brandschenkestrasse 45 · 8002 Zurich
Book an appointment: +41 43 234 55 55 · dermetrics.ch

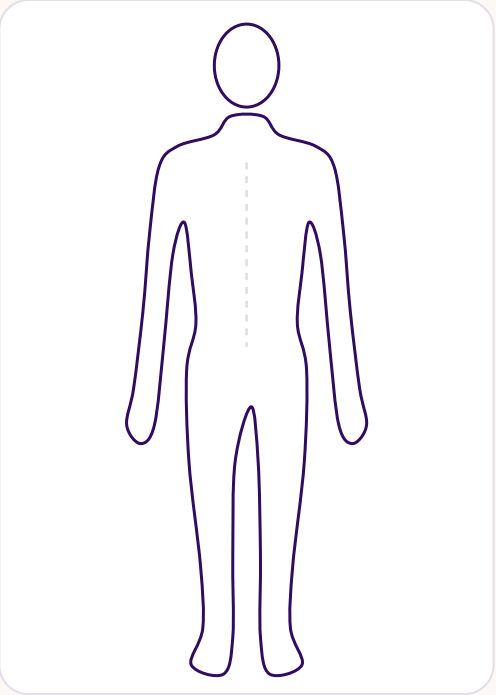
This guide is general patient information and does not replace individual medical advice. Factual information in accordance with the FMH code of conduct.

3 Record your spots

Mark noticeable spots on the figures, number them and enter them below. This helps you spot changes next time.



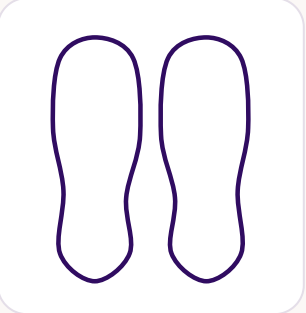
Front



Back



Head



Soles

NO.	BODY SITE	A SHAPE	B BORDER	C COLOUR	D SIZE (MM)	E CHANGED?	DATE
1	*e.g. left shoulder*	*oval, even*	*blurred*	*brown*	*4*	*yes, larger*	*01 Dec*



Ruler (mm)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Dermetrics – Dr. med. Paul Georg · Clinic Selnau · Brandschenkestrasse 45 · 8002 Zurich
Book an appointment: +41 43 234 55 55 · dermetrics.ch

This guide is general patient information and does not replace individual medical advice. Factual information in accordance with the FMH code of conduct.