

SKIN HEALTH

Very few people realize that the skin is the largest organ in the body. The skin is the body's first line of defense against outside invaders. It also keeps the body temperature normal and stores water, fat and vitamin D. Such an important organ requires care and monitoring. Treatment for cancer sometimes causes damage to the skin.

WHO IS AT RISK?

Survivors who received radiation to any part of the body, including total body irradiation (TBI).

Survivors with chronic graft versus host disease (GVHD) following bone marrow or stem cell transplant

WHAT PROBLEMS CAN OCCUR?

The following are possible long-term skin effects that may be seen after cancer therapy.

- Telangiectasias
- Fibrosis
- Scleroderma
- Vitiligo
- Hyperpigmentation
- Skin Cancers
- Basal Cell Carcinoma
- Squamous cell carcinoma
- Melanoma

The key to successful treatment of melanoma is early diagnosis. Moles should be monitored for the changes. Monitoring of moles can be remembered using the "ABCD" warning signs:

- **A is for Asymmetry** (one half of the mole looks different than the other half)
- **B is for Border** (moles that have an irregular, scalloped or poorly defined border)
- **C is for Color** (variations in color from one area of the mole to another, such as different shades of tan and brown or black, or colors such as white, red or blue within a mole)
- **D is for Diameter** (moles larger than 6 millimeters – about the diameter of a pencil eraser – should be evaluated).

If you notice any of the “ABCD” changes, have your healthcare provider check the mole. Moles that have any of these changes usually need to be removed.

WHAT MONITORING IS NEEDED?

If you have any of the following risk factors, you should check your skin monthly for changes, and have a thorough skin examination by a healthcare provider at least once a year:

- You received radiation to any area, including total body irradiation (TBI)
- You have ever had skin cancer or melanoma, or you have a family history of skin cancer or melanoma
- You have “dysplastic” (atypical) moles
- You had a severe sunburn at a young age

WHAT CAN I DO TO KEEP MY SKIN HEALTHY?

The most important thing to remember in caring for your skin is to protect it from the sun. Here are some things you can do:

- Wear protective clothing or sunscreen at all times when your skin is exposed to the sun, even on cloudy or hazy days. The American Cancer Society recommends a sunscreen with an SPF (sun protection factor) of 15 or higher.
- Do not attempt to tan your skin - avoid tanning booths.
- Avoid outdoor activities from 10am to 2pm when the sun’s rays are most intense (11am to 3pm during daylight savings time). Plan outdoor activities in the early morning or late afternoon hours.
- Reapply sunscreen frequently or use a water resistant sunscreen when swimming or perspiring heavily. This will not only help to protect you from developing skin problems, but will also help you to maintain a youthful appearance.

Works Cited

Adapted from Children’s Oncology Group Long-Term Follow-Up Guidelines for Survivors of Childhood, Adolescent, and Young Adult Cancers
www.survivorshipguidelines.org