



## May 5<sup>th</sup> is Melanoma Monday

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For the past 10 years I had intentions of making a big deal of Melanoma Monday and the date would come and go. Well, this year, with new beginnings in a new practice I am going to get involved. Monday, May 5th is Melanoma Monday and I want to tell you all about it. It is not a beverage, a song or even a disease... rather it is a special day that occurs the first Monday of May where the Academy of Dermatology wants the world to stand up and take notice of their skin.

### **What is Melanoma?**

Did you know that skin cancer is the most common cancer in the United States? It affects one of five people in their lifespan. There are several types of skin cancers but for purpose of honoring Melanoma Monday I am going to talk about this form. Melanoma can be a deadly skin cancer. It can kill you. It is a form of skin cancer where the pigmented-producing cells have uncontrolled growth. If found early it has a 100% cure rate. If left undetected it can kill you. It is estimated that one person dies hourly in the United States from melanoma.

Causes of melanoma can be multifactorial. The first preventable form of causative agents is ultraviolet light from the sun and indoor tanning devices. There is also a genetic predisposition to melanoma. If your parents or a sibling had melanoma your chance of melanoma is increased over others.

### **Who is at risk?**

- My patients will tell me that they are only in the sun during the few months of summer and not all that concerned. To keep it easy to identify if you are at risk the Academy of Dermatology lists these people as high risk individuals:
- Greater than 50 moles
- Being Caucasian with lighter skin
- Relative has melanoma: sibling, children, parents, cousins, aunts, uncles
- Redheads, blondes as well as blue and green eye individuals
- Previous history of melanoma or history of other skin cancers
- Previous history of breast or thyroid cancer
- History of sunburn or prolonged sun exposure

## What does it look like?

Melanomas can be a freckle, a mole that has changed, or a new mole. They most often occur on the upper back, lower legs, head and neck. Because of high risk in tanning among females between the ages of 15-19 they can occur on the trunk and back.

Healthcare providers are educating their patients to know the ABCDE of mole inspection.

- Asymmetry: One half does not match the other half.
- Border irregularity: The edges are ragged, notched or blurred.
- Color: The pigmentation is not uniform. Different shades of tan, brown or black are often present. Dashes of red, white, and blue can add to the mottled appearance.
- Diameter: While melanomas are usually greater than 6mm in diameter when diagnosed, they can be smaller.
- Evolving: A mole or skin lesion that looks different from the rest or is changing in size, shape or color.

We remind people to look at their skin frequently. Looking at your skin quarterly or if a history of melanoma, monthly) is a good guideline for skin inspection. Remember if a lesion, mole or freckles bleeds or itches, it needs to be looked at.

## Prevention, treatment & outcomes

If found early and not gone into the lymph node the 5 year survival rate for melanoma is 98%. If lymph nodes are detected, the 5 year survival rate is 62 %. If the organs are involved or distant lymph noted then the 5 year survival is 15 percent.

The best prevention for melanoma is reducing ultraviolet light exposure. By using your sunscreen correctly you will reduce your chances by one half. You want to wear sunscreen that is spf 30 and apply 15 minutes before going outside and repeat every two hours. If swimming or sweating you repeat every 40-80 minutes depending on the label of the sunscreen. There is some stylish protective clothing out there to purchase. Choose long sleeve shirts, pants, sunglasses and wide brimmed hats.

Remember the sun rays are at their peak between 10 am and 2 pm. Be mindful that you can burn on cloudy days, when outdoors during snow activities and on sandy beaches. Just think.... "If outdoors, I need sunscreen."

From my experience, high risks individuals include people who live or vacation around water, farmers, gardeners, construction workers, runners, golfers, soccer players, tanning bed users and the Caucasian population. That pretty much includes most of the people of the Fergus Falls area. I often times told patients stories of my partners in dermatology. They camped, fished, hiked, cross country skied and had great skin. They just wore their sunscreen and protective clothing attire. They are now 50-60 years of age and look great.

In closing I wish everyone a happy safe sun filled Melanoma Monday. Get outside and have some fun, just don't forget your sunscreen.