

## Michelle Tarbox, M.D.

### Why are screenings for skin cancer important?

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The reason that it's important to have skin cancer screenings or to check your skin regularly is that skin cancer is very, very treatable when it's caught early. It is unfortunately, very common. It's the most common cancer that people make. But if it's caught in its earliest stages, it's 100% treatable, and people can live a completely normal life with just a little scar. If it's detected very late, especially certain types of skin cancer can be much more serious and may require chemotherapy or might even potentially claim the person's life. So we really do care about our patient's skin and their health. And we want to make sure we're screening regularly.

### What do you recommend people look for when doing self checks?

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When people do self checks, which I really do encourage, I ask people to look for any spot that's changing, because skin cancer tends to evolve more quickly than normal spots on your skin do. So something that's changing colors, something that's changing textures, something that's sore or won't heal, certainly anything that looks very significantly worrisome, there are multiple colors in the lesion or there is a very dark color to it. If it has a symptom like pain or itching, all of those would be good reasons to seek out the care of a medical professional.

### Who is more at risk for skin cancer?

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The people who are at greatest risk for skin cancer are people with the lightest photo types and the greatest sun exposure. So if you think about your average West Texan farmer who's usually have some kind of European stock German or English or something like that, and has been living on and working the land in full sun for their entire life, those patients develop a whole lot of skin cancer, but I want to stress that patients with any photo type of skin so patients with the most heavily pigmented, beautiful dark skin to the very most pale, lightest pigmented skin, even patients with no pigment at all. Anybody in that whole spectrum can make skin cancer. Skin pigmentation does have some protective effect, but certainly you can have skin cancer in patients of any skin type.

### Are there different types of skin cancer?

2:04

There are multiple different kinds of skin cancer, the three big heavy hitters that we talked about most frequently, or basal cell squamous, cell and melanoma, because those are the most common ones that we encounter and the ones that are the most likely a patient's going to find on their own. There hundreds of other minor types of skin cancer, the good thing is that a well experienced dermatologist can help find any of those. So getting to see dermatologist to check your skin is the best way to guarantee that we're doing the right thing for you.

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### What is the treatment for skin cancer?

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The treatment for skin cancer depends on the stage and type of skin cancer some early skin cancers can be treated with topical medicines. As they get more advanced, we often have to do some type of surgery to cut out the spot and a margin of normal skin around the edges. And if the skin cancer is a very bad cancer, it might require something called Wide local excision which means that you take a very significant margin and you might take a sentinel lymph node. That procedure is usually done under anesthesia.

### Can someone get skin cancer on an area of skin not always exposed to the sun?

3:06

The most common places we're going to get skin cancer are those parts of our body that see the sun most often like our arms and our hands and our face and our necks, but we can get skin cancer anywhere. And some places that see the sun only rarely can have some of the most dangerous types of skin cancer. For example, you can develop skin cancer on your scalp, melanoma there, for example, that's the same depth as a melanoma on your body would actually have a worse prognosis on your scalp. So it's actually higher stakes to have skin cancer in that area. And having your scalp checked by your dermatologist is a good idea. I also talk to different hair stylists and salons. There's sometimes little conventions where we do educational things to help people find skin cancer in different ways. You know, our stylists are barbers they see scalps more often than any dermatologists does. And I can tell you I've gotten a significant number of patients sent to me by their hairstylist because they found something they weren't sure was okay. And I'm always so happy to see those patients. Nine out of 10 times it's a benign spot, but for every single time we find a spot that is significant and needs treatment that might be a life saved. So that's a very significant thing. So scalps can get skin cancer groins can get skin cancer feet can get skin cancer, the bottom line, if you've got a spot you're not sure it's okay get it checked by a dermatologist.

### In addition to screenings what else can we do to prevent skin cancer?

4:21

And besides having your skin checked regularly, treating your body well actually helps prevent skin cancer. So eating a broad varied diet with lots of different rainbow colors of food. Those plant chemicals that make those pigments are actually photo protective in a lot of ways and help by their antioxidant capacity, detoxify some of the bad effects that we get from UV radiation. You can also of course, make sure that you're doing a good job of protecting your skin from direct sunlight, either using some protective clothing, or seeking shade, or using sunscreen or my favorite a combination of all three of those things because the more protection you have the more likely you are to not miss any areas not have a gap where you end up with a sunburn and potentially elevated risk for skin cancer later down the road.

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### How do we protect children from skin cancer?

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Children are hard to protect because they want to run around and play and they don't want to sit still unless you put their medicine on. So I like to go with easiest. First, find the times of the day where the sun is less intense, so that it's a little bit less risky for the child to be outdoors. So you might kind of schedule their play time, if possible around those less sunny times of the day earlier in the morning later in the afternoon, instead of right in the middle of the day. Also using some protective clothing and getting it to be something of a habit early can be helpful because if a little swim shirt is on it's on and the areas it's covering are protected, and you don't have to worry about did they wash it off, did that splash take all their sunscreen away. If the child has a sun protective shirt on that part of their body is protected. So some protective clothing is one of my favorite things. And then of course the use of a safe and gentle sunscreen was smooth good water resistance, reapplied anytime that you need to especially after toweling off.

### What type of sunscreen do you recommend?

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Really the most important thing is the sunscreen the person will use. So I think it's very important to find a vehicle you're comfortable using and sunscreens come in every vehicle you can think of. So they can come in powders, lotions, gels, creams, sprays, any way you can think of getting your product on your skin sunscreen exists in that form. Finding one that you can use routinely that you're comfortable with is a good idea. The ones that I like the most are the simplest kind. So those include our physical sunscreens like zinc and titanium dioxide. I like simple products that don't have a lot of extra fragrance or color like the Vanicream skincare line. I have no relationship to them, they just make good products. But really whatever you can find that you will use is essential and that I think would be helpful.

### Anything else you would like to add?

6:53

May is melanoma Awareness Month. So we're kind of finishing out the month of May here. And June is for most people including me, the perceived beginning of summer. So I think that you know moving forward into the summertime with some sun smarts will probably help protect our skin, going down the road and help us have a better skin health for the rest of our lives.