

Health

A Skin Cancer App Just Saved This Woman's Life



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Photo: Getty Images

Apps can do a lot of things: figure out how many miles you just ran, tell you what song is playing, and now, apparently, diagnose skin cancer. That's what a New Zealand woman discovered after her app told her a skin discoloration on her leg was melanoma.

Marie Stantiall used the SkinVision app, which analyzes pictures of the spots on a person's skin within 20 seconds and determines whether the person is at a low, medium, or high risk of skin cancer. According to SkinVision.com, the app uses a dermatologist-tested algorithm that checks a person's skin for irregularities in color, texture, and shape. (The app is currently not available in the U.S. but will be coming soon.)

Stantiall tells the *New Zealand Herald* that she initially put her phone down when the red "high risk" alert first appeared. "I had that instant reaction of denial, but I kept going back to look at it until I knew I couldn't ignore it," she said. Stantiall decided to see her doctor, who removed the melanoma right away. "She noticed another lesion near my collarbone and removed that too," Stantiall says.

Melanoma is the most deadly form of skin cancer, and its rates have been on the rise for the past 30 years. According to the American Cancer Society, nearly 74,000 new melanomas were diagnosed last year.

Joshua Zeichner, M.D., a New York City-based board-certified dermatologist, tells Yahoo Beauty that apps like SkinVision are great in that they help raise awareness and may motivate you to examine your skin regularly. "They may even help the untrained eye pick up atypical moles or skin cancers," he says.

However, he says, they shouldn't take the place of regular full-body mole screenings from a board-certified dermatologist. "An app cannot replace the experience of a dermatologist who sees hundreds of moles every day," he says. "Plus, if a mole is new or changing, even if an app tells you the mole is OK, you should still get it checked out in the office."

Gary Goldenberg, M.D., medical director of the Dermatology Faculty Practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells Yahoo Beauty that a biopsy is really the only way to confirm that a lesion is, in fact, skin cancer. "You'll not get this kind of in-depth, accurate information from an app," he says.

However, he notes, some apps allow you to snap a photo and have it examined by a dermatologist. "My patients do this all the time," he says. "Sometimes I'm able to reassure them, but sometimes I ask them to come in and let me examine the lesion live to determine whether or not a biopsy is needed."

Zeichner says it's important to undergo regular skin checks because skin cancer is curable if it's caught early. "If it has not spread, it can be completely removed," he says. "If caught too late, some forms of skin cancer can spread throughout the body and be fatal. Skin cancer screenings can save your life."

Goldenberg says skin checks are important for everyone, but they're especially important for people at a higher risk of developing skin cancer — those with light skin, hair, and eyes and anyone who has a family history of skin cancer or has had a sunburn before the age of 18.

If you suspect something is off with your skin — you have a new dark spot or it has changed — make an appointment with a dermatologist to have it evaluated. Brown moles follow the ABCDE rules, Zeichner says. An atypical mole is usually asymmetric on one side compared to the other; has jagged borders; contains various colors like black, blue, white, and brown; has a large diameter greater than the size of a pencil tip eraser; or has evolved from looking one way to another, he says.

If you notice something like this on your skin, get it checked out ASAP.