

News

Friends Have High Success Rate in Finding Each Other's Melanomas



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Yahoo Beauty December 21, 2016

Andy Cohen recently thanked Kelly Ripa on an episode of *Live!* after she spotted a suspicious-looking black dot on his lip and repeatedly insisted that he get checked out. Cohen finally relented and saw a doctor — and discovered it was a melanoma, the most deadly form of skin cancer. Now, new research suggests that it's important to have a dermatologically savvy friend like Ripa in your life

The study, published in the *JAMA Dermatology journal* found that potential skin cancer lesions and suspicious-looking moles were spotted more easily when people used a partner who had been trained to do skin checks. And, over time, the partner's skills improved, increasing the odds that they would spot an iffy skin lesion.

For the study, researchers recruited nearly 500 people who were part of a couple in which one person had been previously diagnosed with an early-stage melanoma. The couples were randomly assigned to either receive no skin examination training or training from a doctor, a take-home handbook, or audio instruction. Then they were asked to check for suspicious-looking moles every month or every other month for two years.

Couples who received the skin examination training spotted 51 early melanomas, while those who didn't receive any training spotted just 18 melanomas. After several months, the trained partners also became more confident in their skills.

Melanoma is the most deadly form of skin cancer, and rates of the cancer have been rising for the past 30 years. According to the American Cancer Society, an estimated 76,380 new melanomas will be diagnosed this year, and more than 10,000 people will die of the disease in 2016.

Gary Goldenberg, MD, medical director of the dermatology faculty practice at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells Yahoo Beauty that it's a great idea to rope a friend or partner into regular skin checks. "I recommend this to all my patients," he says. A partner can help spot suspicious skin issues that may be difficult for you to find, such as those on your back and the backs of your legs, he says.

Jill Waibel, MD, founder and owner of the Miami Dermatology and Laser Institute, agrees, telling Yahoo Beauty that "the more eyes that are on your skin the better."

In fact, Goldenberg says that there's no downside to this. "Many studies have shown that patients who perform monthly skin exams and recruit their spouse as well do better than those who don't," he says.

Of course, you need to make sure your partner knows what he or she is looking for. Goldenberg recommends that people learn the ABCDE rule for moles: Look for **a**symmetry, an uneven **b**order, a variety of **c**olors, a larger **d**iameter than the size of a pencil eraser, and a mole that is **e**volving in size. (Skincancer.org has photos and more information.)

Joshua Zeichner, MD, a New York City board-certified dermatologist and director of cosmetic and clinical research in dermatology at Mount Sinai Medical Center, tells Yahoo Beauty that regular skin checks are key. “Make sure to look at yourself or have someone close to you, who knows your body well, check you over,” he says. “This way, a more accurate assessment can be made of whether something is new or changing.” If something looks off, it’s time to see a doctor.

That’s a crucial element in this, Zeichner says. While it’s a good idea to have a partner or friend do regular skin checks, it’s also important to see a board-certified dermatologist regularly to have him or her perform expert checks as well. Waibel agrees. “There is no downside to checking your skin for prevention, but it is not recommended to replace your yearly total body skin exam with your board-certified dermatologist,” she says.