

HOW TO CHECK YOURSELF FOR SKIN CANCER, ACCORDING TO A DERMATOLOGIST



GOOD LOOKS

by RACHEL LAPIDOS, MAY 23, 2018



Raise your hand if you've gotten your skin checked this year. Ah, crickets—just as expected. According to the American Academy of Dermatology Association, more than 1 million Americans are living with melanoma—and rates here have doubled from 1982 to 2011. That *plus* it's estimated that over 178 thousand new cases will be diagnosed this year. In other words: Best to get checked.

The thing is, it's almost seen as a luxury to go to the dermatologist—they can be pricey, hard to get into, and even a *tad* intimidating (just me?).

Now, however, a new device exists that makes yearly skin checks incredibly fast and easy (*and* painless). A Swedish med-tech brand called Sci Base is introducing Nevisense to the United States market. It's a non-invasive machine that can check spots instantly via an electrical current. "It passes a teeny tiny electrical current through the tissue and can predict with a 98 percent certainty if a spot is normal or abnormal," says Gary Goldenberg, MD, of New York's Goldenberg Dermatology (which has the first Nevisense in the US). "That's because your normal tissue is like brick and mortar—very well-organized and put together. An abnormal tissue is the same ball of cells but it's disorganized."

Because of this, the electrical current from the machine can tell what type of cells are inside your tissue, and will read a score from 0-10 (3 or below means you have a 2 percent chance it's an abnormal spot). "If it's 4 and above,

it's a much higher percent," says Dr. Goldenberg. "It's a logarithmic scale, so it quickly goes up. And there's a direct correlation between the numerical value according to the machine and how abnormal the spot is."

I tried it myself, and can attest to how quick and painless it is. It feels like you're just touching your skin with a wand, but the payoff could be huge. Dr. Goldenberg notes that so many people have spots that look between normal and abnormal. "If the score's more concerning, then we'd do the biopsy and send it to the lab—it helps us find spots earlier in the process which is good because you want to get spots before they turn into cancer," he says. "And they can save people from having unnecessary biopsies if it's not needed."

Of course, even at home, there are still ways you can know if a spot's abnormal or not. "There's ABCDE criteria for melanoma," says Dr. Goldenberg. By checking your own skin seasonally, you can monitor any abnormal spots and tell your doctor about them sooner rather than later.

Keep reading for the skin check tricks below.



The ABCDEs of skin check self-exams

A: Asymmetry. First, you should ask yourself: "Is it symmetric or asymmetric?" notes Dr. Goldenberg. Symmetry is a good sign.

B: Border regulation. The border should be smooth, not jagged.

C: Color regularity. "See if it's one or two colors, evenly colored, or black and grey and blue and red," says Dr. Goldenberg. "Melanoma are usually multicolored."

D: Diameter. "The spots that are more likely to be malignant especially late are larger than 6 millimeters in size, which is the size of pencil eraser," he says.

E: Evolving. "This is an important one," says Dr. Goldenberg. "A spot can be normal today, but in a year it can have a group of cells that are abnormal—which can then develop into melanoma."