

Healthy Aging

Spot It Early: Lifesaving Lesson About Skin Cancer

(NAPSA)—Whenever you're under the sun, whether it's summer or winter, it's important to guard against sun damage. Ultra-violet radiation from the sun is the No. 1 cause of skin cancer, and it often doesn't develop until later in life.

Take, for example, retiree Adelbert "Mac" McIntyre, who now lives in Hawaii. Between his day job laying gas pipelines in San Diego and his free time spent on the beach, Mac found both his life's work and his relaxation in the sunshine.

All that sunlight took a toll. When he had a routine physical, Kaiser Permanente doctors found a small spot on McIntyre's chest that caused some suspicion. "They said it looked rather peculiar," he remembered. Test results confirmed that suspicion—McIntyre had melanoma.

Melanoma is the third most common type of skin cancer, but it's by far the most deadly because it can spread to a person's lymph nodes and organs. The National Cancer Institute estimates that one in 50 men and women will be diagnosed with melanoma during their lifetimes. More than 9,000 people in the United States will die from the disease this year.

"When caught early, melanoma is highly treatable," said Amy Reisenauer, M.D., a Kaiser Permanente dermatologist. Although doctors removed McIntyre's skin cancer twice in one year, he forgot to follow up with his dermatologist. The cancer developed for a third time.

"I think it's probably human nature to feel like, well, I had something on my skin, it was a skin cancer, but they cut it out, so it's done," said Dr. Reisenauer. "But in fact—especially with melanoma—there is a risk for it to spread to other parts



It's a healthy idea to check yourself regularly for signs of skin cancer. A dermatologist can tell you how.

of the body, and you really do need to be seen on a regular basis."

Fortunately, a newly created melanoma patient registry flagged McIntyre's missed visit. Kaiser Permanente scheduled another appointment, and just in time. Dr. Reisenauer discovered melanoma on his back early enough to remove it successfully.

While some people may not be so lucky, the good news is that many types of skin cancer are easy to prevent and most can be cured if caught early. You can see a video about McIntyre's story at <http://bit.ly/19Rumc0>.

These lifesaving tips can help you protect yourself against skin cancer all year long.

Who's At Risk For Melanoma

Though men over 50 are most at risk for developing melanoma, there is a rise in young women developing melanoma as well. But these demographics are not exclusive, and often, men and women who develop melanoma are dealing with fallout from sun damage that began when they were children.

How To Spot Melanoma

Melanoma can be found with

a simple self-examination using a full-length mirror. At its earliest stage, melanoma is usually identifiable by oddly shaped moles or marks that appear on the body. Know the "ABCDs" of melanoma:

• **A is for Asymmetry.** One half of the mole looks different from the other half.

• **B is for Border Irregularity.** The edges are ragged, notched or blurred.

• **C is for Color.** Watch for shades of red and black, or a red, white and blue mottled appearance.

• **D is for Diameter.** The mole is larger than a pencil eraser. (Harmless moles are usually smaller than this.)

A self-exam for any of these symptoms should be done once a month.

How To Prevent Skin Cancer

• Avoid the sun when its rays are the strongest—between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.

• Wear clothing to protect exposed skin—a wide-brimmed hat, long pants, sunglasses and a long-sleeved shirt.

• Apply sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays with a sun protective factor (SPF) of 15 or higher. Look for all these terms (UVA, UVB and SPF) on the label.

• Reapply sunscreen every two hours for maximum protection from UVA and UVB rays.

• Avoid indoor tanning.

Where To Learn More

Visit kp.org for more information and sfy.co/jLf3 to see a transcript of a recent #kphealthychat on Twitter with Kaiser Permanente dermatologist Jeffrey Benabio, M.D. For questions or advice about a specific condition, always consult with your physician.