

The ABCDEs of melanoma prevention and detection

Melanoma survivor T.J. Sharpe discusses skin cancer prevention and detection, and shares tips on how to keep you and your loved ones safe in the sun.

By [T.J. Sharpe](#) | Aug 29, 2018



T.J. Sharpe, melanoma survivor, blogger and cancer advocate

It is summertime where I live, and that means a lot of fun in the sun for adults and children alike. It also means remembering sun safety for yourself, encouraging it for others, and being vigilant about checking your skin for any abnormalities. It is a LOT easier to beat Stage IV melanoma by detecting it early.

First, the detection part. Getting screened for skin cancer is among the easiest tests you'll ever undergo; it's simply a visual inspection of your skin by a medical professional. It is equally important to self-monitor for abnormal skin lesions that could potentially lead to something worse. Keeping an eye on your skin – or someone else's – can save you or them from skin cancer, or catch the disease before it worsens. And it is as simple as doing your ABCs...or ABCDEs.

Per the [Melanoma Research Foundation's website](#), here are the ABCDEs of melanoma:¹

- **A - Asymmetrical shape**

Melanoma lesions are often irregular, or not symmetrical, in shape.

- **B - Border**

Melanoma lesions usually have irregular borders that are difficult to define.

- **C - Color**

The presence of more than one color (blue, black, brown, tan, etc.) or the uneven distribution of color can sometimes be a warning sign of melanoma.

- **D - Diameter**

Melanoma lesions are often greater than 6 millimeters in diameter (approximately the size of a pencil eraser).

- **E - Evolution**

If a mole has gone through recent changes in color and/or size, bring it to the attention of a dermatologist immediately.

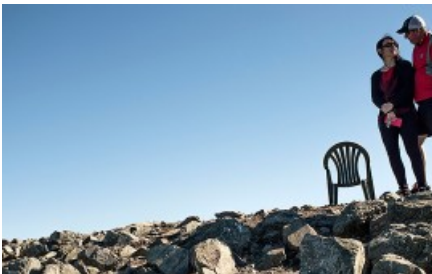
The best way to avoid incurring these ABCDEs is to be diligent about sun protection – particularly for kids, whose chances of developing melanoma later in life increase dramatically after just a few sunburns by the time they are 20.² Good sun protection habits start early, yet many young adults are not educated on the importance of sun safety and thus never fully develop an understanding about why it is important, especially at that critical age.

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Public awareness and initiatives about sun safety in many countries far exceed what is found in the United States, where bronzing on the beach is still considered prime summertime leisure, particularly on the coastal regions. For example, this writer reflects on how she was taught about sun safety growing up in Australia, where skin cancer rates are among the highest in the world:³

"Australia is the driest continent on the planet, and sun safety is on the preschool curriculum and continued throughout school. 'No hat, no play' was the mantra at elementary. Thanks to mandatory sunscreen stations at kindergarten, I mastered its application by age 5."

Compare that to the US, where many places – including Florida – still require a doctor's note to allow children to apply sunscreen at school.⁴ While most of a child's time at school is usually spent indoors, it can take 15 minutes or less for the skin to burn.⁵



Patient Perspectives

During the summer months, when the sun's UV rays are most intense, the need to be diligent becomes even more important.⁶ There's no cute acronym for being sun smart; it's just a matter of doing the basics. Apply and reapply sunscreen for any prolonged sun exposure, especially during midday (10 am to 4 pm). Keep the sun off your head and face with hats (wide-brimmed, if possible). Invest in a few loose, long-sleeved shirts because you might not always follow the sunscreen reapplication guideline of every two hours.⁷

To summarize: Keep yourself shaded, especially during the summer, using sunscreen, clothing and common sense. Have your skin checked by a local dermatologist; a thorough exam takes 10-20 minutes and can catch melanoma and other skin cancers early – before a small lesion becomes a big problem. Look for moles on your own body using the guidelines above, and also monitor moles on your partner and children. And remember your ABCDEs.

This is the fifth installment in a series of blog posts authored by patient and advocate T.J. Sharpe for Novartis.com. Check back regularly for new installments and learn more about T.J.'s story [here](#).

T.J. Sharpe is not a medical professional, but a patient currently undergoing care for advanced melanoma. He is being compensated by Novartis for sharing his story. All opinions are his own. Any and all information, tips, advice, etc. included throughout his series of blog posts stem from his own experience as a patient. Patients should always consult their doctors when seeking medical advice.

References

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