



SOS

Save Our Skin

Beauty is more than skin deep. Unfortunately, skin diseases can be, too.

Among the most common and deadly is melanoma — a form of cancer that begins in skin pigment cells. According to the National Cancer Institute, one in 53 men and women will be diagnosed with melanoma during their lifetime. More than 68,000 cases of melanoma were diagnosed in 2009, with nearly 9,000 deaths from the disease.

“The incidence rate for melanoma is increasing about 3 percent a year,” says Cheryl Lee Eberting, M.D., a board-certified dermatologist, former fellow of the National Institutes of Health and owner of Alpine Dermatology in Alpine, Utah. “It is 10 times more common in whites than in African Americans and slightly more common in males. The rates are highest in your 80s; however, it is not uncommon even in people under age 30. It is one of the most common cancers in adolescents and young adults.”

Diagnosed early, melanoma is almost always treatable with surgery. But when diagnosed at a late stage there is “nothing that really works” to cure it, she says.

Melanoma Prevention

By Natalie Hollingshead



Dr. Eberting giving an exam.

“When diagnosed too late, melanoma is often deadly,” Eberting says. “The five-year survival rate for stage four is 45 percent. But if melanoma is detected at its very earliest stage, the survival rate is between 95 and 99 percent.”

Many people associate melanoma with moles. Although melanoma can manifest in atypical moles, other varieties are only detectable by the highly trained eye.

“It can look completely innocuous or it can be very obvious,” Eberting says. “That is why it is very important to have a dermatologist check your skin once a year from head-to-toe. We know how to look for the rare presentations and the common presentations.”

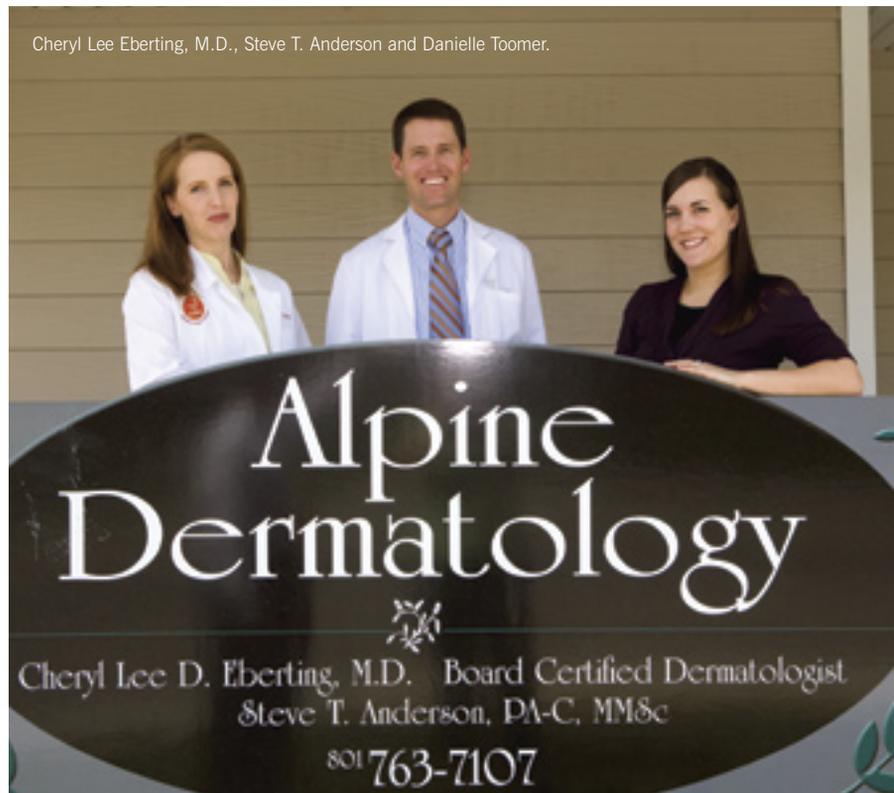
During the exam, the doctor should check “everywhere you have skin,” including scalp, mouth, buttocks and even between your toes, Eberting says.

People with lots of moles or atypical moles should be checked more frequently. Bi-monthly digital photos may help identify unhealthy changes in moles. Dermatologists use the acronym ABCDE to help patients know what to look for. A stands for asymmetry; B is for irregular borders; C is for color (more than one or a change in color); D is for diameter (no greater than 6 mm or the size of a pencil eraser); and E for evolution.

“The most important one is change,” Eberting says. “A new mole should start very small and may grow very slowly over the years, like a tree grows over time. A melanoma is often like a stalk of corn. All of the sudden you notice, ‘Wow, that didn’t used to be there.’”

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Cheryl Lee Eberting, M.D., Steve T. Anderson and Danielle Toomer.



Early recognition makes a huge difference in prognosis, but minimizing risk factors is crucial, too. Although genetic risk factors cannot be removed, limiting sun exposure is extremely important. When exposed to the sun, wear sunscreen with a minimum SPF of 30, long-sleeved shirt and pants, and a hat if possible.

“Staying out of the sun and avoiding tanning beds is the one thing that we absolutely know can prevent the risk of melanoma,” Eberting says.

To learn more about melanoma and to see photos, visit Eberting’s Web site and blog at www.alpineskin.com and at <http://alpineskin.wordpress.com>.