

# YOUR BODY, YOUR HEALTH

## Your Body, Your Health

Our society puts a high value on physical appearance. Pearly white teeth, shiny hair, flawless skin and well-manicured nails are all seen as positive assets. But did you know that dull or damaged hair, nails, skin and other physical signs may indicate a health issue? If any of the physical signs described in this seminar apply to you, be sure to visit your healthcare provider for a proper physical exam and diagnosis.

### Skin Issues

Your skin has many functions including regulating body temperature, protecting against bacteria and other pathogens, and it sends signals through the sense of touch to your brain. With such a big surface area, there are plenty of chances for your skin to signal an illness.

### Bruises

Easily bruising may be a sign of a problem. As you age, it is common to bruise more easily. Thinning skin and aging capillaries make older people more prone to bruising. Certain medications like aspirin and blood thinners could also be factors. If advanced age and medications aren't issues for you, bruising could mean a vitamin deficiency, blood clotting disorder, inflammatory disease, liver disease or even cancer.

### Purpura

Sometimes confused with bruises, purpura are purple or brown spots and patches appearing on the skin due to blood under the skin. Purpura occur when small blood vessels join together or leak blood under the skin. The spots may be small or cover large areas. As with bruising, older people with thin skin may be more prone to developing purpura. Certain medications can cause purpura to develop as can certain infectious diseases. Bleeding disorders and vitamin deficiencies may also be a cause.

### Skin Cancer

According to the American Cancer Society, skin cancer is the most common type of cancer. It accounts for nearly half of all cancers in the US. Melanoma, which is the most serious form of skin cancer, will account for more than 75,000 cases of skin cancer in 2012. Skin cancer can be found by doing a skin exam. You can do this yourself, but you should also have your doctor do a thorough skin exam.



Your doctor will be able to check your scalp, back and other areas that you are unable to see. Look for:

- Any change on your skin, especially in the size or color of a mole.
- Scaliness, oozing, bleeding, or change in the appearance of a bump or nodule.
- Coloring that has spread beyond the borders of a mole.
- A change in sensation, such as itchiness, tenderness, or pain in the skin.

### Diabetes and Skin

Dark velvety brown patches on your skin could be a sign of diabetes. Called acanthosis nigricans, these dark patches appear most often in the creases and folds around the neck, underarms and groin. Obesity and type 2 diabetes are common causes of these dark spots. If obesity is the cause, losing weight will often improve it. Certain cancers may cause severe cases of acanthosis nigricans to develop. In this case, these dark spots may appear on the lips, palms and soles of the feet.

Your skin may give you other warning signs of diabetes. Wounds that won't heal or brown scaly patches on the front of the legs may be an indication of diabetes. Talk to your doctor about a blood glucose test.

## A MIRROR ON YOUR HEALTH

### Nails

Your fingernails and toenails are made of layers of a hardened protein called keratin. According to the National Institutes of Health your nails' health can be a clue to your overall health. Healthy nails are usually smooth and consistent in color while discoloration and changes in growth rate can signal various diseases. White spots and vertical ridges on the nails are harmless.

“Spoon-shaped” nails could be a sign of anemia. Pitted or dented nails may indicate psoriasis. Nail problems that sometimes require medical treatment include bacterial and fungal infections, ingrown nails, tumors and warts. Keeping nails clean, dry and trimmed can help you avoid some problems. Brittle and peeling nails, while unsightly, are not usually anything to be concerned about. They are usually the result of dryness.

### Hair

Hair grows out of tens of thousands of follicles on your scalp. While thinning and balding are part of the aging process, they can also be signs of something else. Thyroid problems, diabetes and autoimmune diseases such as lupus can all cause abnormal thinning of the hair and balding. Nutritional deficiencies and stress can also cause hair loss.

### Tongue

Your tongue is responsible for the sense of taste. But changes in your tongue can mean more than just changes to your taste buds! White patches on the tongue could indicate a bacterial infection. A black, hairy appearance is usually from an overgrowth of bacteria in the mouth. Canker sores are common for some people and should not be cause for alarm. They will usually heal up within 10 days. Sores that take longer to heal could be a sign of oral cancer and should be checked right away.



### Bad Breath

Chronic bad breath, also called halitosis, can indicate health concerns other than just eating a garlicky or oniony meal. Bad breath can be caused by poor dental hygiene, gum disease, cavities, and poorly fitting dentures. Dry mouth, certain respiratory infections, gastric reflux, diabetes and even kidney and liver disease can contribute to bad breath. Treating the underlying condition should help resolve bad breath. It's important to pay attention to the physical signs your body is giving you. While most of the time these changes may be nothing to worry about, let a doctor be the judge. If you notice any changes in your skin, hair, nails or mouth, seek medical advice to find out if something serious is going on and what can be done about it.