Rachel Maddow Reveals She Has Skin Cancer [VIDEO]

The MSNBC anchor revealed that she had surgery for skin cancer and made a passionate plea for everyone to get screened for the disease.

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The way Rachel Maddow described it on her MSNBC show, The Rachel Maddow Show, the discovery of the mole on her neck that turned out to be skin cancer was a lucky accident.

She and her partner, Susan Mikula, were at a minor league baseball game. Because Maddow usually drives, Mikula sits to her right, but this time Mikula was sitting on her left and thus noticed the mole and told her it had changed.

“I had no idea what she was talking about,” said Maddow, according to NBC News. Mikula insisted, “We’ve been together 22 years. That mole has changed.” Maddow’s hairstylist later confirmed that the mole had changed, which prompted a visit to her dermatologist, a biopsy, diagnosis and surgery. “Susan was right, like she always is,” said Maddow, adding, “I am going to be absolutely fine.”

The cable news host then made a passionate plea to her millions of viewers to get regular checkups. “Schedule a check now with your doctor,” she said. "Then when your doctor tells you you’re fine, but you should do this every year, put it in the calendar in your phone for a year from now, and then actually come back and do that follow-up appointment.

As Simple as ABCDE

While the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) does not currently recommend routine skin cancer screenings for people without symptoms, many experts advise regular self-exams and clinical examinations to check for things such as abnormal moles or sores that don’t heal.

Having an abnormal mole examined, as Maddow did, is one of the most effective ways to catch skin cancer early. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests looking for these signs, easily memorized as ABCDE:

A: asymmetrical moles

B: moles with irregular or ragged borders

C: moles that contain different colors

D: moles that are more than a quarter inch in diameter

E: moles that are evolving, or changing in size, shape or appearance

The CDC's advice: "Talk to your doctor if you notice changes in your skin, such as a new growth, a sore that doesn't heal, a change in an old growth, or any of the A-B-C-D-Es of melanoma."

Early Detection for Melanoma Really Matters

While Maddow did not specify which skin cancer she was treated for, she went on to say:

"Even the deadliest kinds of skin cancer now, the ones that like to spread into other parts of your body, the ones that really like to try to kill you, even the skin cancers that are the deadliest skin cancers in this country, those too, are way more treatable than they used to be…on one condition, that you get them early. Even the most worrying forms of skin cancer, if you identify them early enough, are quite treatable."

Advances in treatment, including immunotherapy, for melanoma have led to a dramatic improvement in survival outcomes over the last decade, including for later stages. But the chances for a successful outcome are still better when the disease is caught at the earliest possible moment.

For melanoma that is caught at an early stage and is localized (has not spread), the five-year survival rate is 99%, according to the American Cancer Society. That number drops to 66% for melanoma that has spread to the region and to 27% when it has metastasized to distant parts of the body.

While these statistics may not directly relate to Maddow's specific cancer experience, they reinforce her message that close attention to a change in a mole and keeping up with regular checkups can make a big difference in one's chances of surviving skin cancer.

"It's only by the grace of Susan that I found mine in enough time that it was totally treatable," said Maddow, "because I have been blowing off my appointments forever to get stuff like that checked because I've assumed it will always be fine."

To learn more about skin cancer, click here. To learn more about melanoma, click here. To learn about advances in melanoma treatment, click here.

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