

How to Check Your Moles

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that can be deadly. The good news is that melanoma has a cure rate of nearly 100 percent when found early and properly treated.

To find potential melanoma early, perform a skin self-exam. Examine all of your skin, including your scalp, between your fingers, on your toes, on the sole of your foot, and even under your nails. As you look at each mole, watch for the ABCDEs:

Asymmetry

One half of the mole looks different from the other half.

Border

The mole has an irregular, scalloped, or poorly defined border.

Color

The mole has more than one color, which may include shades of tan, brown, black, white, red, or blue.

Diameter

The mole has a diameter longer than 6 mm (the size of a pencil eraser).

Evolving

The mole or spot looks different from the rest, may have appeared suddenly, or is changing in size, shape, or color.

If any of these criteria describe a mole on your body, make an appointment to see a dermatologist immediately.

You might have melanoma.



To learn more, visit SpotSkinCancer.org.

There, you can

- learn how to perform a skin self-exam,
- download a body mole map to help you track changes on your skin,
- find free skin cancer screenings in your area, and
- download free educational materials about skin cancer.



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Moles

Recognizing, Preventing,
and Treating Melanoma



How to Tell If Your Mole Is Normal



Moles are harmless, but skin cancer can develop in or near a mole. So how can you be sure your moles are safe? Take a look at the following list, which describes a normal mole:

- It's one color—typically brown, tan, black, pink, blue, skin-toned, or colorless.
- It's round or oval in shape.
- It's flat or slightly raised.
- It doesn't change from month to month or may change slowly over time, possibly even disappearing.
- It may or may not have hair.
- It may differ in size, shape, or color from other moles on the body.

Sun Protection Keeps Skin Healthy

Being out in the sun can increase the number of moles on your skin, which, in turn, increases your risk for melanoma. Reduce your risk for all types of skin cancer by protecting your skin from the sun:

- Use sunscreen that offers both UVA and UVB protection, is water resistant, and has a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or more.
- Wear sunscreen every day. Research shows that this practice can reduce the risk of developing melanoma by half.
- Reapply sunscreen every two hours, even on cloudy days. Also, reapply after swimming or sweating.
- When possible, wear a long-sleeved shirt, pants, a wide-brimmed hat, and sunglasses.
- Seek shade between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. or any time your shadow is shorter than you are.
- Protect your skin when around water, snow, and sand, which reflect and intensify the sun's damaging rays.
- Never use a tanning bed; opt for a self-tanning product or spray instead, and be sure to continue using sunscreen. UV light from the sun and tanning beds can cause skin cancer and wrinkling.

Removing a Mole

Never try to remove a mole yourself. You risk infecting and disfiguring your skin.

If your dermatologist sees a mole or other spot that looks abnormal, he or she will recommend removing it. Mole removal is a safe and simple procedure when performed by a dermatologist and can be done during an office visit. Here's how it will work:

1. Your dermatologist will numb the area so that you do not feel pain, then surgically remove the mole.
2. You may or may not need stitches to close the wound.
3. The skin that your dermatologist removes will be examined under a microscope to determine if the mole is cancerous. Removing the skin and examining it under a microscope is called a skin biopsy.
4. The results of your skin biopsy will be described in the biopsy report.

What Is an Atypical Nevus?

An atypical or dysplastic nevus is a mole that does not look normal but is not cancerous, either. These moles have a higher risk of progressing to melanoma. If you are diagnosed with an atypical nevus after a biopsy, your dermatologist will determine if the mole requires any further treatment.

If a mole or other spot reappears after a skin biopsy, make an appointment to see your dermatologist immediately.