



# MOLE MYSTERY

Are you seeing spots? The average person has between 10 and 40 moles, though the number can vary drastically. The number of moles that you have can change throughout your life, as new moles can develop and some may disappear as you age. You can develop moles almost anywhere on your body, including your scalp and underneath your fingernails. But what exactly are they, and where do they come from? Moles are small, colored spots made of melanocytes, which are cells that make the pigment of your skin. Usually these cells are evenly distributed

across your skin, but moles appear when these cells occur in clusters, causing small areas of your skin to darken. Though most moles are harmless, it is important to keep an eye on them in case they develop into abnormal moles, called dysplastic nevi, that have the possibility of becoming cancerous. It isn't as hard as you might think to sharpen your skin-detective skills and solve your own mole mystery.



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You should visit a dermatologist yearly for a routine full-body skin examination. Your dermatologist will closely examine any moles on your skin and will likely biopsy any suspicious-looking growths. In between your annual examinations, you should also complete self-examinations, to watch for any changes to your skin and to assist in early detection of skin cancer, so that you can alert your doctor if there are any changes. Use the ABCDE method to remember what to check for:

- A – Asymmetry
- B – Border Irregularity
- C – Color Change
- D – Diameter
- E – Evolving

Though most are harmless, some moles can develop into melanoma, or skin cancer. Melanomas often appear suddenly and are dark and fast-growing. You should also let your doctor know if you have a mole that is painful, itching, burning, inflamed, oozing, or bleeding, as these symptoms can also be a sign of

melanoma. When you do your self-examination, make sure you check your entire body, as moles can appear anywhere. Don't forget to check around your ears, scalp, and underarms; underneath breasts, buttocks and genitals; bottoms of your feet, between toes; and under your nails. Don't forget to remove any polish before doing a self-exam or visiting your dermatologist!

**To protect your skin and avoid skin cancer**, particularly if you have several moles, it is crucial to be extra careful in the sun. Avoiding overexposure to UV light can reduce your chances of developing melanoma.

- Stay in the shade between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., when UV rays are strongest
- Wear a hat and UV-blocking sunglasses to protect your face
- Wear SPF 15 or higher sunscreen, and reapply every few hours and after swimming
- Avoid tanning beds



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