

Patient Information Leaflet: Moles (Melanocytic Naevi) and Their Management

What are Moles?

Moles, also known as melanocytic naevi, are common skin growths that appear as brown or black spots on the skin. They are formed by clusters of melanocytes, the cells responsible for producing the pigment melanin. Moles can vary in size, colour, and shape, and are typically benign (non-cancerous). Most people have between 10 and 40 moles by adulthood.

Types of Moles:

1. **Common Moles (Naevus):** Small, round, evenly coloured (often light tan brown) moles that usually appear during childhood or adolescence.
2. **Atypical Moles (Dysplastic Naevi):** Larger moles with irregular shapes, uneven colours, and potentially more significant risk of developing into melanoma.
3. **Congenital Moles:** Moles present at birth or shortly thereafter; these can be larger and may require monitoring.
4. **Acquired Moles:** Moles that develop over time as a result of sun exposure or other factors.

Causes of Moles:

While the exact cause of moles is not fully understood, several factors may influence their development:

- **Genetics:** Family history plays a role in determining the number and type of moles.
- **Sun Exposure:** UV radiation from the sun or tanning beds can contribute to the appearance of moles.
- **Hormonal Changes:** Changes during puberty or pregnancy may influence the development of new moles.

Monitoring Moles:

It is important to regularly monitor your moles for any changes. You can use the ABCDE rule to help identify potential warning signs of melanoma:

- **A - Asymmetry:** One half of the mole does not match the other half.
- **B - Border:** The edges of the mole are irregular, ragged, or blurred.
- **C - Colour:** The mole has varying colours (brown, black, blue-grey, pink, or white).
- **D - Diameter:** The mole is larger than 6 mm (about the size of a pencil eraser).
- **E - Evolving:** The mole is changing in size, shape, or colour over time.

When to Seek Medical Advice:

Request a prompt evaluation from a healthcare provider or dermatologist if you notice any of the following:

- Changes in an existing mole or the development of new moles that meet the ABCDE criteria.
- Moles that itch, bleed, or become painful.
- Moles with a change in colour or texture.



Experts in Skin & Hair

Diagnosis:

If there are concerns about a mole, a dermatologist may perform a physical examination and may recommend a biopsy, where a small portion of the mole is removed and examined under a microscope to check for cancerous cells. More typically in the UK the entire mole is removed with a narrow 2mm margin to get a more informed and accurate opinion from the pathologist. This is called a narrow margin excision.

Management and Treatment Options:

Management of moles typically involves monitoring them for any changes. Whole body mole mapping is an excellent tool for patients with lots of moles who require regular monitoring. However, if a mole is suspicious or bothersome, treatment options may include:

1. **Observation:** Regular check-ups to monitor existing moles for any changes.
2. **Biopsy:** If a mole is concerning, a biopsy may be performed to rule out melanoma or other skin cancers.
3. **Surgical Excision:** The mole can be surgically removed if it is deemed suspicious, bothersome, or for cosmetic reasons.
4. **Shave Biopsy:** In some cases, a dermatologist may use a shave technique to remove a mole for analysis without full excision. This may be used for benign moles that are raised and catching.

Prevention Tips:

- **Sun Protection:** Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 50 or higher, wear protective clothing, and avoid excessive sun exposure, especially during peak hours, 11-3pm.
- **Regular Skin Checks:** Conduct monthly self-examinations for any new moles or changes to existing moles.
- **Avoid Tanning Beds:** Refrain from using indoor tanning devices, as they can increase the risk of developing melanoma.

Conclusion:

Moles are common skin growths that usually do not cause harm but require monitoring to ensure they do not change or develop into skin cancer. Regular self-examinations and sun protection measures are essential to maintaining skin health.

If you have questions about your moles, concerns about changes, or would like to discuss management options, please consult your dermatologist for further evaluation and guidance.

