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Patient Information Leaflet: Lentigo Maligna and Lentigo Maligna Melanoma

What is Lentigo Maligna?

Lentigo maligna is a type of skin lesion that appears as a flat, brown or black patch on sun-damaged skin, typically found on the face, neck, and arms. It usually develops slowly over many years and decades and is considered a precursor to a specific type of melanoma known as lentigo maligna melanoma (LMM). While lentigo maligna itself is not cancerous, it can evolve into malignant melanoma if left untreated.

What is Lentigo Maligna Melanoma?

Lentigo maligna melanoma is the invasive form of lentigo maligna. This occurs when the atypical cells found in lentigo maligna penetrate deeper into the skin layers. LMM is classified as a type of melanoma, which is a cancer of the melanocytes (pigment-producing cells). It can metastasise (spread) to other parts of the body if not detected and treated early.

Causes and Risk Factors:

- **Sun Exposure:** Chronic exposure to UV radiation from sunlight is the primary risk factor for developing lentigo maligna and, subsequently, lentigo maligna melanoma.
- **Fair Skin:** Individuals with lighter skin types are at higher risk of developing lentigo maligna due to reduced melanin protection against UV radiation.
- **Age:** Lentigo maligna commonly occurs in older adults, especially those over the age of 50.
- **History of Skin Damage:** Previous skin injuries, solar damage, or extensive sunburns can increase risk.

Symptoms:

- **Lentigo Maligna:** Appears as a flat, irregularly shaped skin patch that is often larger than a pencil eraser (6 mm or more). The colour may vary from light brown to dark brown or black and can be mottled or uneven.
- **Lentigo Maligna Melanoma:** Symptoms may include any changes in the size, shape, or colour of the existing lentigo maligna. Invasive LMM may also appear as a raised lesion, irritation, or ulceration of the skin and may be accompanied by itching.

Diagnosis:

Diagnosis begins with a thorough physical examination of the skin by a dermatologist. If lentigo maligna or lentigo maligna melanoma is suspected, a skin biopsy will be performed, allowing a pathologist to examine the cells under a microscope to confirm the diagnosis.

Management and Treatment Options:

Managing lentigo maligna and lentigo maligna melanoma typically involves surgical intervention. Treatment options include:

1. **Topical Medications:**
 - In some cases, topical treatment like imiquimod or 5-fluorouracil may be used, especially for lentigo maligna that is non-invasive.
2. **Surgical Excision:**
 - The most common and effective treatment is complete surgical removal of the lentigo maligna. If it has progressed to lentigo maligna melanoma, wider excision may be necessary to ensure all cancerous cells are removed.

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3. Mohs Micrographic Surgery:

- A specialised technique where the cancerous tissue is removed layer by layer and examined immediately for cancer cells, minimising damage to surrounding healthy skin.

4. Regular Monitoring:

- After treatment, ongoing follow-up appointments for monitoring the affected area and skin examinations are crucial to detect any recurrences or new lesions.

Prevention Tips:

- **Sun Protection:** Use broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 50 or higher, seek shade, and wear protective clothing and hats, particularly during peak sun hours (11 am to 3 pm).
- **Avoid Tanning Beds:** Steer clear of indoor tanning devices that emit harmful UV radiation.
- **Regular Skin Examinations:** Perform monthly self-examinations for any new or changing moles or skin lesions. Annual dermatological check-ups are recommended, especially for those at increased risk.

When to Seek Medical Advice:

- If you notice any new spots on your skin or changes to existing moles, such as size, shape, colour, or texture.
- If you experience any unusual symptoms, such as itching, bleeding, or changes in the skin's appearance.

Conclusion: Lentigo maligna is a common skin lesion associated with sun exposure, with the potential to progress to lentigo maligna melanoma, a type of skin cancer. Early detection and intervention are key to preventing its progression and ensuring an effective treatment response.

If you have any questions or concerns about lentigo maligna or lentigo maligna melanoma, please consult your dermatologist for further evaluation and guidance.

