



# Melanoma: Referral, tests and investigations (leaflet 3 of 7)

Patient information from the British Association of Dermatologists

Produced for National Cancer Patient Information Pathways, National Cancer Action Team

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Melanoma leaflets in this series, produced by the British Association of Dermatologists:

1. Prevention and risk factors
  2. Symptom awareness and early detection
  3. Referral, tests and investigations
  4. Diagnosis and staging
  5. Treatments
  6. Follow up care and cancer in remission
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If you are at all worried about changes in a mole, or about a new area of pigmentation appearing on your skin, you should see your family doctor.

The ABCD changes listed in the 'symptoms' leaflet can sometimes be found in completely harmless conditions, and your doctor will often be able to put your mind at rest quickly.

However, if there is still any doubt, your doctor will usually refer you to a specialist (a dermatologist or a surgeon with a special interest in pigmented lesions) who will examine the area, perhaps with a special instrument (a dermatoscope), and decide whether it needs to be removed.

The only way in which the diagnosis of a melanoma can be made firmly is by looking at the suspected area under microscope in the laboratory.

If the mole needs to be examined further, the whole of the suspicious area will then be removed under a local anaesthetic (called an 'excision biopsy') and sent to the laboratory to be examined.

If the area is too large to remove easily, a sample of it (a 'biopsy') will be taken. If a melanoma is found, the biopsy specimen will provide valuable information about its type and depth that will help to plan the next step in treatment.

**For more information, please contact:**

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