

Melanoma: Symptom awareness and early detection

(leaflet 2 of 7)



Patient information from the British Association of Dermatologists

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

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

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About a third of melanomas appear in or near to a mole that was already present on the skin, and therefore people with many moles are at greater risk. However a melanoma can also appear on skin that looks quite normal. That's why it's important to let your doctor know about any changes to your skin that are of concern.

The following ABCD-Easy rules to checking a mole that may indicate a skin cancer. As skin cancers vary, you should tell your doctor about any changes to your skin, even if they are not similar to those mentioned here.

Asymmetry - the two halves of the area may differ in their shape.

Border - the edges of the area may be irregular or blurred, and sometimes show notches.

Colour - this may be uneven. Different shades of black, brown and pink may be seen.

Diameter - Most melanomas are at least 6mm in diameter. Report any increase in size or diameter to your doctor.

Expert - if in doubt, check it out! If your GP is concerned about your skin, make sure you see a Consultant Dermatologist, the most expert person to diagnose a skin cancer. Your GP can refer you via the NHS.

You should look at all areas of your skin regularly and particularly if an area of your skin becomes particularly itchy or bleeds. If a mole or dark patch gets bigger or changes, it's important to see your GP.

Ask a friend or family member to check your scalp, ears, back and areas you can't easily see yourself. Using a hand-held mirror can also be helpful when checking hard to reach areas. And don't forget to check the soles of your feet and between your toes.

Other signs to look out for are crusting or oozing of a mole, or a mole that is inflamed or red around the edge, or a mole that itches or changes sensation. If these symptoms don't go away after a couple of weeks, see your doctor.

If something new appears on your skin that looks completely different to anything you have seen before then it is worth getting this checked. Skin cancers tend to grow slowly larger over the months and most tend to be quite irregular in their shape or colour. It is common for melanomas to be flat so don't ignore something that is gradually spreading out over the surface of the skin (e.g. like an ink blot).

Early detection is extremely important as the earlier the diagnosis, the better the prognosis and the less likely it is that the cancer will have spread elsewhere in the body. For more information on this, see our leaflet on 'melanoma: diagnosis and staging'.

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