

BENIGN SKIN MOLES

Mr Sudip Jiban Ghosh MBBS, MS, FRCS(Plast)
Consultant Plastic Surgeon
Clinical Director Burns
Stoke Mandeville Hospital
www.sjgplasticsurgery.com

Moles are exceedingly common and usually well behaved. Unusual features such as CHANGE in size shape or colour may alert one to the need for a specialist examination

WHAT ARE MOLES?

Moles are usually harmless collections of pigmented cells called melanocytes on your skin. They can appear alone or there may be many. We do not know why we have moles and mostly moles are harmless and don't require special care. This is a harmless mole.



WHAT IS A NAEVUS?

Moles are also called naevi; a single mole is a naevus. Most moles are present on the trunk, but they can also be on your face, arms and legs. Moles can be present in more obscure locations as well such as the scalp, under the nails and in the area usually hidden by underwear.

IS IT NORMAL TO HAVE MOLES?

Most of us have from 10 to 40 moles. New moles may appear up to the age of 30-40 years, but most appear by age 20. Some moles disappear with advancing age. It's especially important to become familiar with the moles on your skin because, in rare cases, they can become cancerous. Monitoring your moles and other pigmented patches, such as freckles and age or liver spots, is an important first step in reducing your risk of skin cancer — especially malignant melanoma, which may begin in or near a mole or other dark spot on the skin. Melanoma also can arise in areas of normal pigmentation.

HOW DO WE RECOGNISE NORMAL MOLES?

Moles come in a wide variety of colours, shapes and sizes. They can be flesh-coloured, brown, blue or black spots that vary in shape from oval to round. The surface of a mole can be smooth or wrinkled, flat or raised. Over your lifetime, some of your moles are likely to change. With exposure to sun, they may darken. They also may start out flat and brown in colour and later become slightly raised and lighter in colour. This is a healthy mole with hairs.

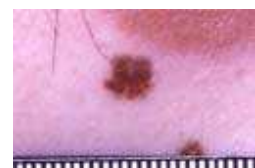


WHY DO MOLES CHANGE?

There are certain times in your life when moles may be more apt to change. During adolescence, for example, moles may darken and become larger. During pregnancy, women may develop numerous and darker moles. It is important to monitor your own moles for changes in size, shape, color, texture and sensation that may indicate a problem. These moles should be examined.

ARE PARTICULAR TYPES OF MOLE MORE AT RISK?

Several types of moles have a higher than average risk of becoming cancerous. They



include:

MOLES THAT RUN IN FAMILIES

Moles that are larger than average — which is about 1/4 inch (6 millimeters) or the diameter of the end of a pencil — and irregular in shape are known as atypical (dysplastic) naevi. These moles tend to be hereditary. They are frequently described as looking like fried eggs because they usually have dark brown centers and lighter, uneven borders. Overall, they may look red or tan. If you have dysplastic naevi (of which this one is an example), you have a greater risk of developing malignant melanoma.

LARGE MOLES PRESENT AT BIRTH

Large moles that are present at birth are called congenital naevi or giant hairy naevi. These moles may increase your risk of malignant melanoma. In general, moles that are more than the size of an adult open palm pose the greatest risk. Any mole that was present at birth and is palm-sized or larger should be examined by an expert.

NUMEROUS MOLES.

If you have many moles larger than the end of a pencil you are at greater risk of developing melanoma