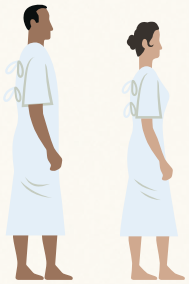
Dysplastic nevi

INFORM DIAGNOSTICS

The word "nevus" (pronounced nee-vus), is medically defined as a pigmented area of skin, a mole, or a birthmark. Nevi is the plural form for more than one of these areas of skin. The term dysplastic is the adjective for dysplasia, which means an abnormal growth of cells. Your tissue sample recently examined by pathologists has been diagnosed as *"Dysplastic nevi,"* which literally means, "an abnormal growth pattern of a mole (or moles) or pigmented skin area." In other words, the tissue is considered "atypical." Pathologists have several definitions of these atypical cells that your doctor will discuss with you.

What this really means

Scientists have determined an association between dysplastic nevi and skin cancer, (called melanoma); however, your diagnosis does not mean you have skin cancer. Having dysplastic nevi is an alert to the possibility that the abnormal moles your doctor tested could change further. This is an early warning to watch for potentially developing skin cancer.



Moles are made up of clusters of melanocytes, the pigment cells that produce melanin, which causes skin to tan when exposed to sunlight.

Where moles come from

Moles can be congenital, which means they are present at birth; or acquired, meaning they develop later, most often from exposure to ultraviolet light. However, genetics does play a role in the type and number of moles you may have. Usually they are dark brown, but they can be light-colored and they can be different shapes and sizes, and may be flat or raised.

What are moles made of?

These pigmented skin growths are made up of cells called melanocytes, which are the cells that produce the pigment called melanin. When we are exposed to sunlight, the melanin reacts and makes our skin darker, causing tanning. However, moles are a cluster of these melanocytic cells, and exposure to sunlight or artificial ultraviolet light (tanning beds) may sometimes trigger chemical changes resulting in skin cancer. These cancerous moles are surgically removed by a dermatologist using outpatient procedures usually done in their office.

Everyone is at risk

While some families who have a history of congenital moles and melanoma have a higher risk for developing skin cancer, everyone is at risk. Typically, skin cancer is more common in fair-skinned people with light-colored eyes, but darker-skinned individuals, while they have a lower risk, can still develop melanoma. Risk is increased among people who spend time outside without protective sunscreen; among people who had early, severe childhood sunburns; among people who have more than 50 ordinary moles; and/or among people who have a family history of melanoma.

Following the ABCDE awareness technique

Your diagnosis of dysplastic nevi means you and your doctor will monitor your skin on a regular basis. Contact your doctor immediately if you observe a change in any of the ABCDE rules listed below.

A. If you see that a mole has an uneven or ***asymmetric*** shape (one half does not match the other half).

B. If it develops or has an irregular ***border*** (a ragged or ill-defined border).

C. If it has shades, or uneven ***color***, of red, brown, tan, blue white, or black.

D. If its ***diameter*** is greater than a pencil eraser (6mm, or ¼ inch).

E. If you observe it is an ***evolving*** or changing mole.

Take year-round protective strategies

Protecting yourself year round is essential! Did you know that snow and sand are good reflectors of the sun's rays?

1. Always wear a sunscreen labeled for both UVB and UVA, applied 15 minutes before going outdoors.
2. Shade your face with a hat and wear sunglasses to protect your eyes.

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3. Minimize outdoor exposure between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

4. Wear protective clothing to keep the sun off sensitive areas – shirts with long sleeves, gloves and trousers.

Learn more and stay informed

Here are some good resources to learn more about taking care of the largest organ your body has—*your skin!*

emedicine.medscape.com/article/1056283-overview

www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/screening-moles-cancer

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/moles

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