

Health Tips

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with

Dr. D



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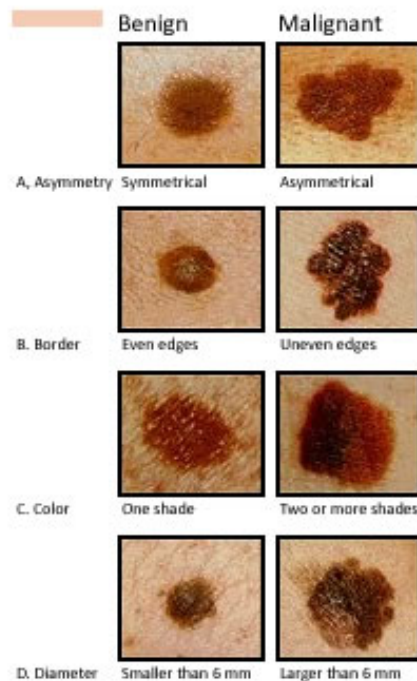
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Health Tip: The "Ugly Duckling" Melanoma

Melanoma is a cancer of the pigment producing cells (melanocytes) cells of the skin. Melanoma begins on the surface of the skin but over time can extend deeper, eventually reaching the blood and lymphatic vessels. From there it can spread throughout the body, becoming a life-threatening disease.



For many years, the early warning signs for detecting melanoma have been identified by the acronym "ABCDE". "A" stands for **Asymmetry** meaning one half is unlike the other half. "B" is for **Border**, which in a melanoma is usually irregular, scalloped or poorly defined. "C" stands for **Color**, which varies from one area of the melanoma to another, typically in shades of tan, brown or black. "D" is for **Diameter**, most often larger than 6 mm (the size of a pencil eraser) across. "E" which stands for **Evolving**, was added to the acronym a few years ago. It was added primarily to detect melanomas smaller than 6 mm because of their changing size, shape or color.

The risk factors for the development of melanoma include:

- Fair skin
- A history of sunburns
- A close relative who has had a melanoma
- Atypical moles
- More than 50 moles

The key to treating melanoma is recognizing symptoms early. The American Cancer Society recommends professional skin examinations every year for people older than 40, and every 3 years for people aged 20 - 40. Monthly self-examination is also recommended.

Recently a new distinguishing feature, known as the **"Ugly Duckling Sign"** was

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added as a practical way to spot malignant melanoma skin cancer. This is an especially useful way of detecting melanomas in people who have multiple moles. The idea behind the ugly duckling sign is that moles in the same individual tend to resemble one another, whereas pre-malignant moles and malignant melanomas will deviate from this typical mole pattern.

This model was developed by a researcher who compared the ability to use the ugly duckling sign among 8 melanoma experts, 13 general dermatologists, 5 dermatology nurses and 8 non-clinical medical staff. After reviewing photographs of individuals with normal moles, atypical moles and melanomas, there was a remarkable correlation between what the "experts" were able to detect as well as the non-MD participants. While the mole experts picked up 100% of the melanomas, the non-MDs rate of detection was 85%, only slightly less than the 89% detection rate of the general dermatologists.

The key to using the "ugly duckling sign" is to look for "outlier" moles. These look or feel different than other moles, or change more over time than other moles. These are the "ugly ducklings" that deserve further investigation.

The "ugly duckling sign" will not replace the traditional "ABCDE" method of detecting melanomas. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the "ABCDE" method to improve melanoma detection. Instructions in performing [skin self-examination](#) are available from the Skin Cancer Foundation.

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