Mole

Moles are very common. They are usually harmless skin spots. People usually develop many of them over their lifetime. Moles increase in number during the first three decades of life. Women tend to have more total moles and most of the moles are located on their legs. Men have more moles on their trunk. People with a light complexion have more moles than people with a dark complexion. African Americans tend to have more moles on the palms, soles, the white of the eye and nailbeds. Moles can be different colors, from light brown to black. They may be flat or raised, and sometimes they contain hair. Although moles can change over time, they only rarely turn into skin cancer. The moles that are benign (do not turn into cancer) are usually:

- Small (about a quarter of an inch or less [6mm or less] or the size of a pencil eraser).
- One color.
- Smooth.
- Have a uniform border.
- Round and oval and do not change much in appearance over time.

Malignant melanoma is a skin cancer that starts like a mole. Moles that were present at birth are more likely to turn into a melanoma later in life especially if they were very large (larger than 7 inches [20 cm] in diameter) at birth.

Melanomas are different from moles. Melanomas:

- Have Borders that are more ragged.
- Have more than one color (red, white or blue) in addition to brown or black.
- Are usually bigger.

Years of sun exposure increases the risk for getting melanoma. It is important to look at your moles regularly so that you can notice any changes that may occur within anyone of them that make it different from your other moles on your body. Know the A, B, C, D's of your moles – a mole is more worrisome for a melanoma if:

A- it is **A**symmetrical (one half is different from the other half).
B- the **B**orders are jagged, etched or irregular.
C- the **C**olor is uneven (shades of brown, tan and/or black).
D- the **D**iameter is greater than a quarter of an inch (6 mm).

You should see your doctor soon if your mole:

- Bleeds or becomes an open sore or does not heal.
- Grows rapidly or changes color.
- Becomes irregular and bumpy.
- Becomes painful, itchy, tender or sensitive.

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