

Department of Dermatology
**Dysplastic naevi
(atypical moles)**
Information for patients



You have been given a diagnosis of dysplastic naevi (also known as atypical (unusual) moles). This leaflet has been written to give you further information about your diagnosis and treatment options.

What are dysplastic naevi?

Naevi are more commonly known as moles. The word 'dysplastic' means that the moles look abnormal but are **not** cancerous.

You are more likely to develop dysplastic naevi if you are fair-skinned, especially if you have been exposed to significant sunshine. It's also possible to inherit the potential to develop dysplastic naevi from your parents.

What do dysplastic naevi look like?

They are usually larger than 5mm in size in size and can have an irregular border. They can be made up of several different colours. Some people have many of these moles, while others just have a few.

How are they diagnosed?

Dysplastic naevi are easy to recognise and your doctor will normally be able to diagnose them by their appearance. If necessary, the diagnosis can be confirmed by removing the mole (also known as naevus) and examining it under a microscope.

Can they be treated?

If you have a dysplastic naevus, it is important to have it looked at by your doctor/dermatologist. The mole, and some normal skin around it, may need to be removed to check it more thoroughly. If a mole is removed, it is examined in the laboratory under a microscope, to confirm it is not cancerous and to check that the entire mole has been completely removed.

Can you cure dysplastic naevi?

If the mole is mildly or moderately abnormal and completely removed, we would not expect any further problems. If the mole is graded as severely abnormal, you may need to have more surgery to remove extra skin from around the removed mole, as a precaution. This may mean a further surgical procedure at a later date.

Would the mole become cancerous if left?

There is an increased risk of dysplastic naevi turning cancerous (e.g. developing into a melanoma) compared with a normal looking mole. This risk is higher if you have lots of dysplastic naevi or if you have a number of family members who also have many dysplastic naevi.

Can I prevent myself from developing dysplastic naevi?

Currently, there is no way of preventing the development of dysplastic naevi. Some people will be born with them. However, as these types of moles can be related to sun exposure, we advise avoiding sun exposure when the sun's rays are strongest (between 11.00am-3.00pm). You should also use sunscreen protection (at least SPF 30) from April to October and cover up with a hat and long sleeves. Don't get burnt, don't go sunbathing and avoid sunbeds.

What if many abnormal moles are found in my family?

This could be a hereditary condition called 'Familial Dysplastic Naevus Syndrome' or 'atypical mole syndrome'. If we suspect that you have this condition, it is important to have a full body screen with a dermatologist. They may recommend that you have photographs taken of the skin over your whole body (full skin photography). You may be referred for regular screening, to allow early detection and treatment of melanoma (cancerous cells).

How do I recognise a melanoma?

The ABCDE rule

Ask a friend or family member to check your skin every couple of months for any change in your moles. Signs to look for include:

Asymmetry: do the two halves of the mole look the same?

Border: are the edges irregular, blurred or jagged?

Colours: is the colour uneven, with more than two shades?

Diameter: is the mole larger than 6mm in diameter?

Evolution: is there any change in a mole of any description?

If you answer 'Yes' to any of the above, contact your doctor. Early detection has a much higher cure rate, so if you are worried, get in touch!

Further information

Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK offers information about sun awareness and checking your moles.

Tel: 0808 800 4040

website: www.cancerresearchuk.org

Who to contact

If you have any questions about your diagnosis or treatment, your GP will be able to advise you.

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **PALS@ouh.nhs.uk**

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