

# Melanoma

## What Is Melanoma?

Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer that can cause serious illness and even death. If it is recognized and treated early, it is almost always curable, but if it is not, the cancer can advance and spread to other parts of the body, where it becomes hard to treat and can be fatal. While it is not the most common of the skin cancers, it causes the most deaths. The American Cancer Society estimates that at present, about 120,000 new cases of melanoma in the US are diagnosed in a year. In 2010, about 68,130 of these were invasive melanomas, with about 38,870 in males and 29, 260 in women.

Melanoma originates in **melanocytes**, the cells which produce the pigment melanin that colors our skin, hair, and eyes. The majority of melanomas are black or brown, but often they can also be skin-colored, pink, red, purple, blue or white.

## Am I at Risk?

Everyone is at some risk for melanoma, but increased risk depends on several factors: sun exposure, number of moles on the skin, skin type and family history (genetics).

### Increased Risk Factors:

- Sun exposure (try to limit sun exposure and wear sunscreen)
- Moles
- Skin Type (people with fairer skin are at increased risk)
- Family History
- Personal History (once you have melanoma you increase the chance of recurrence)
- Weakened Immune System (from various illnesses, chemotherapy, etc)

### Examination Scheduling

Individuals with atypical mole syndrome can improve their chances of early detection by increasing the frequency of skin self-examination and by visiting a physician more often for a full-body skin exam. The clinician may take photographs to document whether there are new moles or changes in older ones.

### Warning Signs: The ABCDEs of Melanoma

Moles, brown spots and growths on the skin are usually harmless — but not always. Anyone who has more than 100 moles is at greater risk for melanoma. The first signs can appear in one or more atypical moles. That's why it's so important to get to know your skin very well and to recognize any changes in the moles on your body. Look for the **ABCDE** signs of melanoma, and if you see one or more, make an appointment with a physician immediately.



#### Asymmetry

If you draw a line through this mole, the two halves will not match.



#### Border

The borders of an early melanoma tend to be uneven. The edges may be scalloped or notched.



### Color

Having a variety of colors is another warning signal. A number of different shades of brown, tan or black could appear. A melanoma may also become red, blue or some other color.



### Diameter

Melanomas usually are larger in diameter than the size of the eraser on your pencil (1/4 inch or 6 mm), but they may sometimes be smaller when first detected.



### Evolving

Any change — in size, shape, color, elevation, or another trait, or any new symptom such as bleeding, itching or crusting — points to danger.

Prompt action is your best protection. The pictures below show normal moles and melanomas.

	Benign	Malignant	
Symmetrical			Asymmetrical (the two sides do not match)
Borders are even			Borders are uneven
One color			Two or more colors
Smaller than 1/4 inch			Larger than 1/4 inch
Ordinary mole			Changing in size, shape, color, or another trait