

MOLE (NEVUS)

Moles are harmless skin growths that may be flat or protruding. The medical word for mole is nevus. They vary in color from pink, flesh tones to dark brown or black. Everyone has moles; some patients have quite a number while others have only a few. The number depends on your family background.

Moles begin to grow when you are very young. New ones can develop at any age. Once a mole appears it usually stays for life. A growing or changing mole in a young person is almost always harmless. On the other hand, if an adult's mole markedly changes in color, in size, or bleeds it should be checked. When you are younger all of your moles are flat and when you are older all your moles are raised. In other words moles do become raised with time. This is the normal growth pattern.

Most moles are harmless and safe to ignore. Moles may be treated under the following conditions:

1. A mole that has bled, has an unusual shape, is growing rapidly, or changing color noticeably is giving warning signs. A mole like this should be removed.
2. A mole that is irritated by your clothing, comb, or razor is usually only a nuisance, but it can be removed to prevent the irritation from continuing.
3. A mole that is unsightly can be removed because you do not like the way it looks.

Treating a protruding mole is a simple procedure. After the skin is numb, I can remove the projecting part of the mole with a special instrument. Normally, this portion is sent to the lab for microscopic examination. The area heals to leave a flat mark, which is sometimes slightly discolored.

Sometimes removing a mole requires surgical excision and stitches. The way the mole is removed depends on the location and its appearance.

Moles sometimes grow coarse hair, which may be safely removed by shaving or plucking. Permanent removal of the hair, which has roots deep within the mole, requires electrolysis or complete surgical excision.

The great majority of moles are harmless and best ignored. Protuberant moles that annoy you can easily be converted into flat areas by simple office surgery. Bleeding, rapid growth, unusual appearance, or sudden change are reasons that you should have a mole checked.