

# Cutaneous Malignant Melanoma

## What is cutaneous malignant melanoma?

It is a dangerous form of skin cancer that can spread throughout your body if you don't get treatment.

## Who gets it?

Anyone can get melanoma, but some people have a higher risk, including those with:

- A family history of melanoma (mother, father, sister, or brother)
- A history of a blistering sunburn as a child
- Skin that usually burns, but doesn't tan
- More than 50 moles of any size
- Moles larger than a pencil eraser (6 mm)

It is very unusual for children to get melanoma, but it can happen.

## How can I tell if I have it?

First, you want to see if you have any abnormal spots on your skin. Using a memory tool based on the letters A, B, C, D, and E is one way to help you identify spots that may need to be looked at more closely. A stands for asymmetry (one-half of the mole is different from the other half); B stands for border (the border of the mole is irregular); C stands for color (the mole has different shades of color); D stands for diameter (the mole is larger than the size of a pencil eraser); and E stands for evolving (the mole is changing in size, shape, or color). If you are not sure whether a

spot is something to worry about, see your doctor.

The only way to find out for sure if you have melanoma is by having your doctor remove a sample of the spot on your skin to be examined (called a skin biopsy). If you have melanoma, the biopsy will also tell your doctor how deep the melanoma goes into your skin.

## How is it treated?

Melanoma is treated by removing the cancerous spot and some of the normal skin around the spot. In most cases, this can be done at your doctor's office with numbing medicine. If you have a larger melanoma, your doctor may refer you to a dermatologist or a surgeon.

If you have a melanoma that has grown more deeply into your skin (1 mm or deeper), your doctor may recommend you have a biopsy of your lymph node. This can help to figure out if your melanoma has spread.

## Where can I get more information?

AAFP's Patient Education Resource

Web site: <http://familydoctor.org/614.xml>

American Academy of Dermatology

Web site: <http://www.aad.org/skin-conditions/dermatology-a-to-z/melanoma> and <http://www.aad.org/skin-conditions/skin-cancer-detection/about-skin-self-exams/how-to-examine-your-skin>

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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