

Know When It's Not a Beauty Mark

Most adults have between 10 and 40 moles dotting their bodies. But determining the difference between an innocent, even Cindy Crawford-beautiful spot and a cancerous one isn't easy. *Prevention* advisor Mary Lupo, MD, a dermatologist in New Orleans, suggests scanning skin monthly and seeing a dermatologist if any markings have changed rapidly in the past year or fit these descriptions.



Pink, flaky; usually on the face, hands, or arms; grows back rapidly

ACTINIC KERATOSIS In 20% of cases, these "precancers" lead to squamous cell carcinoma. Patients may mistake the scaly patches for eczema, says derm Ellen Marmur, MD.



Pink, shiny; typically on the head, neck, or ears

BASAL CELL CARCINOMA The most common skin cancer rarely metastasizes, but growths on ears or lips risk spreading to the lymph nodes and then the lungs.



Red, flaky, raised; often on the head, neck, ears, lips, hands, or arms

SQUAMOUS CELL CARCINOMA The lesions tend to look like sores that won't heal. Those on lips and ears have a higher risk of metastasis, and in very rare cases, the cancer can be fatal.



Asymmetrical, with uneven borders and color; forms anywhere on the body

MELANOMA This is the deadliest form of skin cancer. The growths are usually the size of a pencil eraser or larger. The uneven coloring can include deep blue or red, dark brown, and black.

A Scanner That Sizes Up Moles

Approved by the FDA in 2011, MelaFind (melafind.com) is an in-office handheld scanner that analyzes irregular moles.

In a clinical trial, it correctly identified 98% of melanomas, compared with 78% by dermatologists. "It's a second opinion that makes a diagnosis more accurate," says Ronald Moy, MD, a dermatologist in Los Angeles.

iSpy Skin Cancer?

In a University of Pittsburgh review of skin cancer smartphone apps, a program that had a dermatologist analyze photos was the most accurate, correctly assessing 98% of moles. The worst app was wrong in an alarming 93% of cases. The conclusion: Apps can be used to track changes in growths, but they can't take the place of an MD.