Growing purple mole: Should I be concerned? [1]

Dear Alice,

I have a mole which has turned very dark purple, and grown a bit in size (still small). This is the second time it has done this ? last time was a couple of weeks ago, and it slowly faded back to almost nothing until today. Should I be very concerned about this?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Moles, which are usually brown "beauty marks" that look like raised freckles on the skin, are quite common and most often harmless. People commonly have between 10 and 40 moles on their bodies, though studies show that people who have more than 100 moles are at greater risk for melanoma, a common form of skin cancer. Your mole may continue to change over time, and new moles may appear until about age 40. While it is normal for skin and moles to change, sometimes the changes can be caused by cancer, which is why people are advised to keep a conscientious watch of their various marks and moles.

The Skin Cancer Foundation [2] offers the ABCDEs of melanoma, a way to track the changes of your mole to make sure it stays out of the danger zone. As they appear on the Skin Cancer Foundation's website [3] (which includes useful photographs of all examples described), the ABCDEs of melanoma are:

- **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.

If you've noticed one or more of these signs, it's probably a good idea to see a doctor or dermatologist right away.

Skin cancer works by destroying skin cells and tissues, and if the affected area isn't removed
it can spread (metastasize) to other parts of the body. The three most common types of skin cancer are basal cell cancer [4], squamous cell cancer [5], and melanoma [6], which are mostly caused by overexposure to the sun, the use of tanning beds or sunlamps, and repeated exposure to X-rays, chemicals, and radiation.

You are smart to notice and question such changes in your skin's appearance. Many serious problems can be avoided by early detection and treatment. Because what you described is difficult to diagnose online, you might want to make an appointment with a health care provider to find out what, if anything, the changes of your mole mean. Whatever the outcome, make sure to wear sunscreen when out in the sun, and to avoid tanning beds so your skin and moles stay healthy and cancer-free.

Alice!
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