How to Recognize Melanoma

Zachary Ginsberg

Dr. Amit Sharma
Facts†:

One person dies of melanoma nearly every hour.

In 2016, 76,000 new cases of melanoma will be diagnosed in the U.S.

In 2016, 10,000 people will die of melanoma.

About 86% of melanomas are due to the sun.

People with more than 5 sunburns over a lifetime double their risk for melanoma.

Regular use of SPF 30 sunscreen can reduce the risk of melanoma by 50%.

†Skin cancer facts and statistics on this page were taken from the Skin Cancer Foundation's website: http://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts
Before you learn to recognize a melanoma, it is important to understand what a normal mole looks like.
A normal mole looks like these:

Characteristics of these normal moles:

- Round
- Distinct and smooth borders
- Same color all over
- Small size
- Do not change in appearance as time goes on
Melanomas

Melanomas are skin cancers. They appear different from the other moles on the body. If a certain growth on your skin looks different from the others, it might be a melanoma.
ABCDEs of Melanoma

One way that might help you recognize a melanoma is by knowing the ABCDEs of melanoma. If a growth on your skin fits the ABCDE descriptions, it may be a melanoma.

Asymmetry: one half does not look like the other half
Border: faded border with jagged edges and an unusual shape
Color: different shades or colors within
Diameter: wider than 6 millimeters (the width of a pencil)
Evolving: different from the other moles and may be changing in size, shape, or color
Melanoma:

This melanoma has **asymmetry**. The left half does not look like the right half.
What is unusual about this melanoma?

What makes it stand out from the surrounding moles?

Look closely at how there are various groups of brown inside. The overall organization is asymmetrical.
The closer we zoom in, the easier it is to see the different clusters of brown. These melanomas all have asymmetry.
Melanomas can be hard to find because they don’t always have to be dark and stand out.

What makes this melanoma unusual is the border. Its border is not crisp and distinct from the surrounding area. Instead, it fades out.
The shape of this melanoma is not clear. That is because the **border** is not distinct.

It sticks out around the edges instead of being round.

The color of the **border** fades into the color of the skin around it.
Can you see how these melanomas have borders that are spread out and jagged? Can you see how the borders blend into the surrounding skin?
This melanoma has an unusual color.

Melanomas can have a very dark purple color, like this one.
Do you notice the color of these melanomas? Can you also see how the color is not the same all over the whole melanoma?
These two melanomas have a dark purple or brown center that makes them stand out.
Melanomas can also have a red color. This one looks like a red bump on the skin.
Can you see how the color of these melanomas is pink and red, not brown?
Most melanomas stand out. What makes this one stand out?

It looks big and bumpy. The diameter (distance across the melanoma) is definitely bigger than the width of a pencil.
This melanoma was bigger than all the other moles around it. It stands out because of its diameter.
The larger brown spot is a harmless birthmark, but can you see the very dark spot inside?

That’s a melanoma. It kept growing bigger and getting darker. It was evolving (changing in shape and color), indicating it was cancerous.
These melanomas have strange shapes and colors inside. They started as normal looking, but over time evolved. Now they look bigger and more different from the moles around them.
Now that you have seen examples of the ABCDEs, let’s see how much you learned.

Look for the ABCDEs in the following melanomas.
Can you see how this melanoma has asymmetry?

The left half does not match the right half. It has a light brown right side and a raised dark brown spot on the left side.
Does this melanoma have an unusual shape?

Its border is shaped like an oval with a tapered end.

Its diameter is much larger than the diameter of the moles around it.
Neither melanoma is round.

This one is shaped like an “L”.

This one is shaped like a heart.
What is different about this melanoma?

Do you think it has different shades of brown?

It has light and dark brown colors inside.
These two melanomas have different colors inside.
This melanoma has a border that blends into the surrounding skin.

This melanoma started out light and small, but has evolved into the dark, large growth that you see here.
Can you recognize the ABCDEs in these melanomas?

**Asymmetry**
**Border**
**Color**
**Diameter**
**Evolving**
By now, you can see how all of these melanomas differ from the images at the beginning of the book showing what a normal mole looks like.
This publication was made possible through the support of the Christian Haub Family Career Development Award in Cancer Research at Mayo Clinic Arizona Honoring Dr. Richard F. Emslander.

All rights reserved. This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the publisher except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.

First Printing: 2016

Amit Sharma, M.D.
13400 East Shea Boulevard
Scottsdale, AZ 85259