

# CONGENITAL MELANOCYTIC NEVUS

## What is a congenital melanocytic nevus?

A "congenital melanocytic nevus" (aka mole) is the name for a common brown birthmark which is made up of special pigment-producing cells. The size of the birthmark may range from a small 1 cm mark to a giant birthmark covering half of the body or more.



## How common are congenital melanocytic nevus?

Small congenital pigmented moles (brown birthmarks) are seen in 1 percent of all healthy newborn babies. Giant congenital moles (larger than 8 inches) are rare, found in fewer than one in 20,000 newborn infants.

## Why are they special?

Small- and medium-sized congenital moles may rarely develop melanoma, a worrisome form of skin cancer. However, the risk of this happening is less than 1% and in adults, the risk of developing skin cancer in any area of the skin is much higher than the risk of melanoma in a small or medium-sized congenital mole. However, depending upon the appearance of the mole, its location and the ease of removal, we may suggest that the mole be taken out or we may recommend keeping the mole and just paying attention to any changes in the mole.



Rarely, mole cells can be present in the brain - this happens in patients with many 'satellite' moles. If this causes problems, the problems usually show up in the first few months of life.

It is important to inspect congenital moles on a regular basis at home. We may also recommend that some moles be observed in the office with pictures. Signs of early change to melanoma include the development of irregular borders, changes in colour and a change in the smooth surface of the mole. If there are any lumps and bumps in the mole or if the mole starts to bleed, let our office know right away.

For large and giant congenital moles, the risk of developing melanoma is still small, but about 2-5% of patients will develop this form of cancer. Although 95% or more of patients with large or giant congenital moles are fine, we still recommend seeing patients with large or giant congenital moles at least every year.

Fortunately, most patients do fine without any problems. However, if there are problems or if the child does not like the look of the mole, it can be removed (usually by pediatric plastic surgery).