What Is Mole Mapping?

Patients who have many moles or abnormal moles have a higher risk of developing melanoma. If found early, melanoma is curable. The best way to find this disease early is to regularly look for changes in how a mole looks, or new moles that look different from the rest.

Photography is the best way to track changes in your skin over time. Mole mapping involves taking several pictures of your moles and then, as you come in for follow-up visits, your doctor can compare your moles to the photographs.

Your First Mole Mapping Visit

During your first visit, photographs are taken by one of our experienced female photographers and are stored on a secure server. Here are some important things to know about mole mapping:

- Photography is only done on the first visit and usually does not need to be repeated.
- We do not photograph the genital area.
- We will not photograph any areas of skin you do not want photographed. However, mole mapping is only an effective tool to monitor areas that are photographed.
- Once the photographs are stored on the server, only your doctor can access them.

To watch a video about mole mapping, visit https://vimeo.com/79165165. Use password “molemapping.”

What Can I Expect During Follow-Up Visits?

During follow-up visits, your doctor will examine your skin and will access the photos to monitor any moles that may have changed over time. This helps your doctor decide if the mole should be removed (called a biopsy) or closely monitored. This process allows your doctor to identify suspicious moles as early as possible. It also reduces unnecessary biopsies of moles that don’t change over time.

Between visits, examine your skin monthly to look for these changes:

- New moles that appear different from others on your body
- Changes in any of your existing moles
- Any areas or growths that seem abnormal

At your first follow-up visit, we will show you how to use the photographs when doing skin self-exams at home. You may want to bring someone who can learn along with you. We will provide you with a password-protected CD with your photographs to use at home.

Proven Results

Mole mapping used to involve taking a photograph of every abnormal mole during each visit. This was not an effective way to find abnormal moles early because most of the melanomas either developed in normal skin (not in pre-existing moles) or from moles that had appeared normal (not photographed). Since 2004, we have used total-body photography in more than 2000 patients. Our data from 2004-2009 show this system is best for detecting both new and changing moles. We averaged less than one biopsy per patient during this five-year period.

If You Have Questions

For more information, call our mole mapping photographers at 801-587-9292 or Douglas Grossman, MD, at 801-581-4682.

For any cancer-related information, call the G. Mitchell Morris Cancer Learning Center at 1-888-424-2100 toll free.