

Changing Moles: Skin Cancer and Other Causes, Part II

March 12, 2009 [by Jillita Horton](#)

Moles Change for Reasons Besides Skin Cancer

This is Part II of my two-part article about changes in a mole that aren't skin cancer. We've been scared by the media about changes in moles, and skin cancer, a la, "If you notice any changes in a mole, see a doctor immediately, as this could mean skin cancer." And you should, because ruling out skin cancer is very easy for doctors to do. Usually, a changing mole, or one that appears to have changed, is not skin cancer.

I'm telling you this so that if you notice a changing mole, you don't panic and think you'll die. But again, I stress, if a mole has changed, see a doctor as soon as possible, just to play safe. The procedure to determine skin cancer is so easy to perform, that there really is no excuse for skipping the doctor appointment. Changes in a mole have a variety of causes.

Part I (Here) of this series describes four causes that are not skin cancer, and that are not actual physical changes in the mole, but it only seems that way; the Part I article also lists an actual physical change as well, that's not skin cancer.

But what about actual, not just perceived, physical changes that are not skin cancer? I interviewed [Jason R. Lupton, MD, board certified dermatologist practicing in the San Diego, CA area.](#)

"Irritated moles commonly change," he says. "They may get irritated from clothing, rubbing on waistbands for example, rubbing on surfboards! (common here in San Diego), rubbing on jewelry -- these may get irritated and itchy and become red or crusted as a result." (A red or "crusting" mole can also be a sign of skin cancer.)

Dr. Lupton continues: "Also, moles in areas like the axilla (underarms) may become irritated from rubbing/friction. Moles may become 'halo nevi' -- these are moles that develop a ring of light color around them. Although most are benign, these should always be evaluated to ensure they are not melanomas."

If you are pregnant, moles may "may become darker or larger as a result of hormonal changes, or from stretching of the skin -- due to growth or an enlarging abdomen," says Dr. Lupton. "Typically good signs are if multiple moles are getting darker/bigger simultaneously rather than just one particular mole."

Do you have acne? Dr. Lupton explains, "Patients with acne may have moles that 'appear' to change -- either from an underlying cyst or pimple that imparts a swelling or redness to the mole temporarily. This can be differentiated from a changing mole due to the relatively short time period of change."

Moles have a life span, and over a long period (years), they may "simply change and evolve over time -- become smaller, lighter and some actually seem to disappear."

Finally, Dr. Lupton says, "Contact causes for 'mole changes' are also quite plausible, as certain chemical or caustic contacts may impart irritation or redness to the area, making a mole look different."

If changes that you detect in your skin cannot be explained by Dr. Lupton's information, then be sure to read the five other causes of changes, in Part I, Here. Four of these explanations can be confirmed immediately. But all in all, just to play safe, see a dermatologist about any true changes that you have noticed.