

# What to Do When You See Something “Strange” On Your Skin

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When it comes to our skin, spotting something unusual could be a frightening dilemma. So, how do we distinguish exactly what the strange spot is and what specific actions do we take upon noticing it (*without* totally freaking out)? We spoke with dermatologist [Melanie D. Palm, MD, MBA](#), to learn more.

First off, steer clear of the Internet to avoid any inaccuracy or ambiguous information. “See a professional board-certified dermatologist,” Palm suggests. “Dermatologists are the skin experts, and we can distinguish between benign (nothing to worry about) and potentially malignant (skin cancer) skin spots.” To distinguish whether a spot should be classified as “strange,” Palm recommends following these three critical rules:

## Identify the “Ugly Duckling”

“If a spot on your skin doesn’t look like your other spots or moles on your skin, it may be an outlier and a potentially dangerous skin spot,” Palm tells *InStyle*. “If a spot is visually out of sync with the others, get it checked out immediately.”

## The “Sensitive” Spot

A key factor to notice is if the spot or mole becomes symptomatic—meaning itchy, burning, painful or if your mind or hand is automatically drawn to it. “Oftentimes, changing moles or even melanoma can become sensitive as our body tries to fight it off or as our immune system recognizes something is not normal,” she adds. If that begins to occur, Palm recommends seeing a dermatologist for an evaluation right away.

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## Mind Your Alphabet

When looking at a suspect spot, Palm says to always ask yourself the following important questions before taking further action:

**A=** Is there ASYMMETRY? (Meaning one half of the spot does not look like the other).

**B=** Is the BORDER irregular? (The edges are blurred and not well-defined and symmetric).

**C=** Is the COLOR unusual? (More than two colors in a single spot or the presence of black, blue or white can be unusual).

**D=** Is the DIAMETER large? (Meaning the spot is bigger than six millimeters, which is the size of a pencil eraser).

**E=** Is the spot EVOLVING or changing? (Meaning the spot is growing, bleeding, itchy, crusted or otherwise changing in some distinct way).

If you adhere to all the above, it’s extremely crucial to act quickly—not only is it important, it is life-saving (*especially* because melanoma often affects young and healthy individuals). To reduce your risk, Palm recommends getting in the habit of giving yourself

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your risk, Palm recommends getting in the habit of giving yourself a head-to-toe skin exam at the beginning of every month. “Even look in the scalp, mouth, palms, soles, and between the toes,” she adds. “Skin cancer, including melanoma, can even strike in areas that are not exposed to the sun or ultraviolet rays.” In addition, make sure to obtain a yearly skin exam by a board-certified dermatologist.