

# What are congenital melanocytic nevi?

Congenital melanocytic nevi (CMN) are special types of moles. CMN happen when extra pigment-making cells (melanocytes) grow in a baby's skin while the baby is forming before birth. They are not caused by anything their parent did or didn't do during pregnancy. These moles are there when the baby is born, stay on the skin for life, and grow as the child grows.

## WHAT DO CONGENITAL NEVI LOOK LIKE?

CMN usually come in different shades of brown, tan, and pink. They can be as small as a freckle or cover large areas of the body. These birthmarks can be flat, raised, or both. They can also have extra hair growing on them. They can be anywhere on the body. Sometimes, people with a big CMN may also have many smaller moles on their skin.

## ARE CONGENITAL NEVI DANGEROUS?

It is important to know that almost all kids with CMN lead healthy lives.

Small and medium CMN have a less than 1% chance of becoming cancerous over your child's life. Because this risk is low, they can often be watched by the pediatrician and parents.

Large and giant CMN are a bit different. These CMN do have some risks, including melanoma, a type of skin cancer. It is important to have them checked regularly by a dermatologist.

No matter the size of your child's CMN, you should see a dermatologist if:

1. You notice a change in color or shape.
2. It starts bleeding, scabbing, or causing pain.

Signs of changes to watch for are included in our Moles and Melanoma handout: <https://pedsderm.net/for-patients-families/patient-handouts/#Anchor-Moles>

Some kids with giant CMN or many CMN are at risk of *neurocutaneous melanosis* (NCM). This happens if melanocytes build up in the brain and spinal cord. NCM can cause headaches, vomiting, and seizures. Your doctor may recommend an MRI if your child is at risk of NCM.

## DID YOU KNOW?

CMN are grouped by their size in adulthood since they grow with the child. Small and medium CMN are much more common than large and giant CMN.

- » **Small CMN:** less than 1.5 cm
- » **Medium CMN:** 1.5 – 20 cm
- » **Large CMN:** 20-40 cm
- » **Giant CMN:** more than 40 cm

## DO CONGENITAL MELANOCYTIC NEVI HURT?

Most CMN do not have symptoms, but some can be itchy. Using a fragrance-free, thick moisturizer can help prevent and treat itch.

## SHOULD I HAVE MY CHILD'S CONGENITAL MELANOCYTIC NEVUS REMOVED?

Whether a CMN should be removed depends on where it is, its size, and the child's age and health. Talk with your doctor about whether removal is right for your child.

## DO I NEED TO COVER MY CHILD'S NEVUS WITH SUNSCREEN?

It is important to protect all skin, including areas with CMN, from the sun. Use sunscreen, wear protective clothing, and look for shade.

More information can be found in our Sun Protection handout:

<https://pedsderm.net/for-patients-families/patient-handouts/#SunProtection>

### SUPPORT FOR PATIENTS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY CMN:

- » [Nevus Outreach \(www.nevus.org\)](http://www.nevus.org)
- » [Caring Matters Now \(www.caringmattersnow.co.uk\)](http://www.caringmattersnow.co.uk)



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