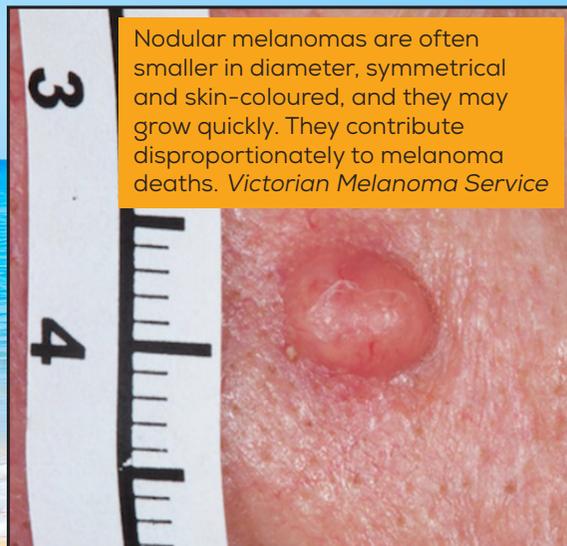


HOW TO RECOGNISE A DANGEROUS MELANOMA THAT DOESN'T REALLY LOOK LIKE ONE ...

by
Jill Margo
IN AFR

Australians are failing to identify the most dangerous kinds of **melanomas**, according to a revision of guidelines now underway.

These pale melanomas grow fast, and men in midlife, particularly those aged 60 and over, are most at risk of developing them.



Nodular melanomas are often smaller in diameter, symmetrical and skin-coloured, and they may grow quickly. They contribute disproportionately to melanoma deaths. *Victorian Melanoma Service*

They can suddenly appear as small, pinkish papules, and in weeks to months grow firm and thick. It doesn't take long for them to invade the skin and cross into the bloodstream.

Although they only account for 15 per cent of melanomas, they are responsible for more than 40 per cent of deaths in some states.

According to the new Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Diagnosis and Management of Melanoma, they can also look like little domes or nodules and while some have a tinge of pigment, some are completely skin-coloured.

The section on atypical melanomas, summarised in the *Medical Journal of Australia* on Monday, says they behave differently to classic melanomas, which usually grow slowly and horizontally.

Classic melanomas typically look like dark ugly ducklings, stand out on the skin and may take ages before they start to invade and cause trouble.

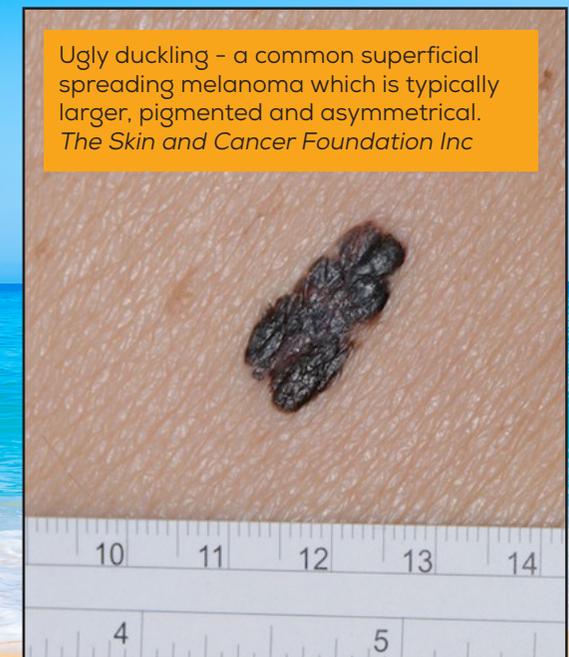
Nodular melanomas can erupt in weeks and become aggressive very quickly.

"But an important feature of both **typical** and **atypical melanomas** is that they change," says Dr Victoria Mar, consultant dermatologist from the Victorian Melanoma Service.

"Perhaps the most helpful feature of significant melanomas is that they are changing, regardless of their other clinical features."

She is part of a Cancer Council Australia working group revising the 2008 guidelines.

To raise awareness of atypical melanomas, the group wants to expand the mnemonic that has been used to diagnose classic melanomas for decades.



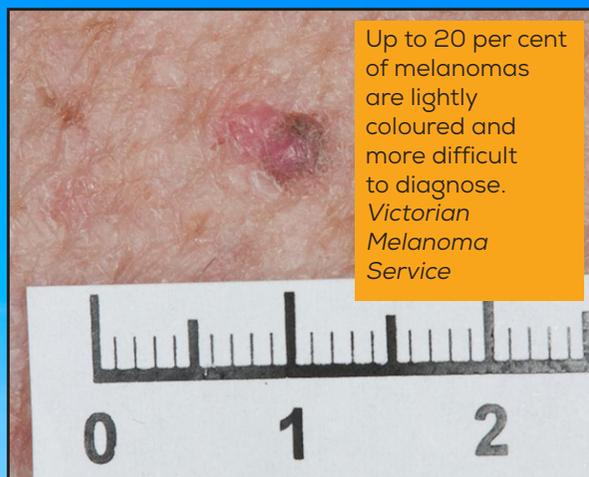
Ugly duckling - a common superficial spreading melanoma which is typically larger, pigmented and asymmetrical. *The Skin and Cancer Foundation Inc*

The mnemonic, ABCD, stands for asymmetry, border irregularity, colour variegation, diameter > 6mm.

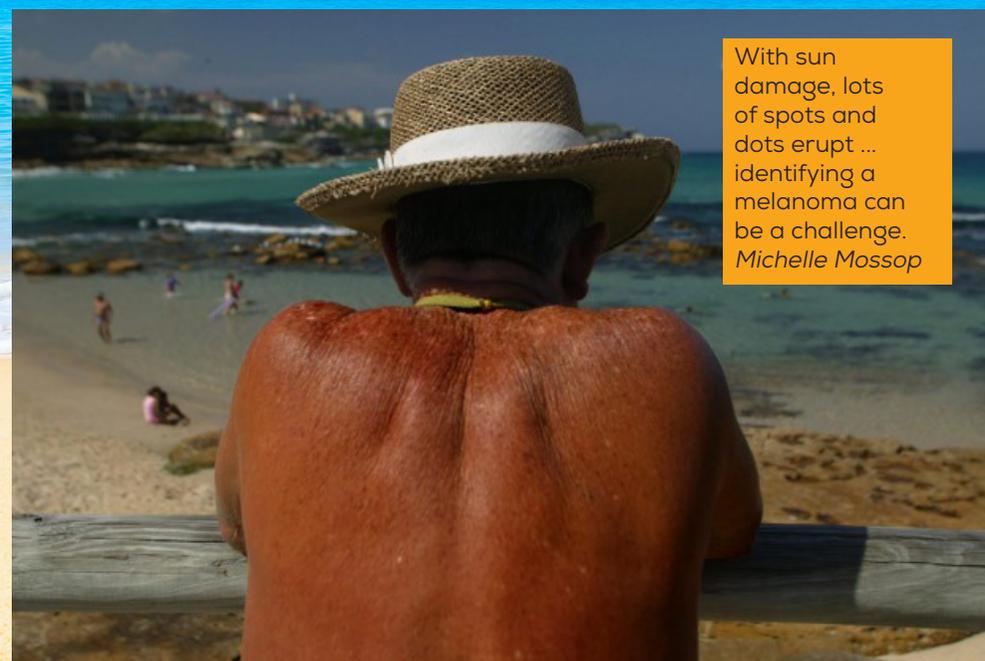
They want to emphasise EFG for elevated, firm and growing.

"Any lesion that is elevated, firm and growing over a period of more than one month should raise suspicion for melanoma," says Mar.

"And any lesion that is changing in shape or growing over a period of more than one month should be surgically removed or referred for prompt expert opinion."



Up to 20 per cent of melanomas are lightly coloured and more difficult to diagnose. *Victorian Melanoma Service*



With sun damage, lots of spots and dots erupt ... identifying a melanoma can be a challenge. *Michelle Mossop*

In Australia, one in 23 men will be diagnosed with a melanoma before the age of 75. For women the number is lower at 1 in 33.

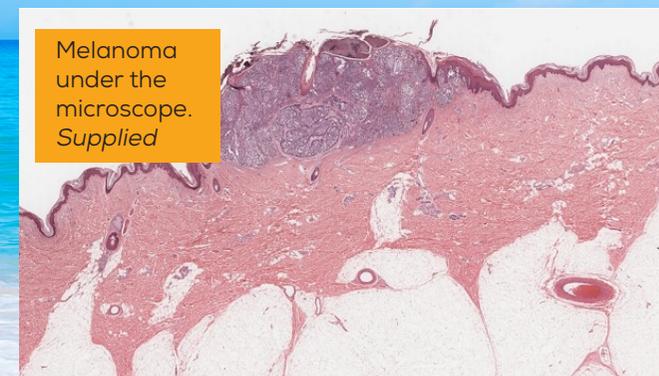
She says it is very important to know your skin so you can recognise something new. With an ageing or sun-damaged skin, this can be a challenge because so many spots, dots and freckles arise.

The tip is to watch for something new that keeps growing. It may or may not be itchy, it may or may not bleed and it can mimic other types of skin cancer.

If it's growing and it doesn't meet the ABCD criteria, see if it meets EFG because there is a fairly narrow window of opportunity before they grow thick and invade, says Mar.

Under a skin magnifier, a dermascope, atypical melanomas may have scar-like de-pigmentation, irregular blue-grey dots, a blue-white veil, and milky pink areas or shiny white streaks.

It could be useful to keep notes or photos of growing skin spots, to capture their history and describe changes in size, shape, colour, elevation and ulceration to your doctor.



Melanoma under the microscope. *Supplied*

As melanomas can occur in places not easily seen, it's a good idea to have a partner, a family member or a friend check your back or have a full skin check by your family doctor.

The new guidelines are now available at Cancer Council.

<http://www.afr.com/lifestyle/health/mens-health/how-to-recognise-a-dangerous-melanoma-that-doesnt-really-look-like-one-20171006-gyw5oh#ixzz4zohw3kxs>