The word “nevus” (pronounced nee-vus), is medically defined as a pigmented area of skin, a mole, or a birthmark. Nevus is the plural form for more than one of these areas of skin. The term dysplastic is the adjective for dysplasia, which means an abnormal growth of cells. Your tissue sample recently examined by pathologists has been diagnosed as “Dysplastic nevi,” which literally means, “an abnormal growth pattern of a mole (or moles) or pigmented skin area.” In other words, the tissue is considered “atypical.” Pathologists have several definitions of these atypical cells that your doctor will discuss with you.

What this really means
Scientists have determined an association between dysplastic nevi and skin cancer, (called melanoma); however, your diagnosis does not mean you have skin cancer. Having dysplastic nevi is an alert to the possibility that the abnormal moles your doctor tested could change further. This is an early warning to watch for potentially developing skin cancer.

Where moles come from
Moles can be congenital, which means they are present at birth; or acquired, meaning they develop later, most often from exposure to ultraviolet light. However, genetics does play a role in the type and number of moles you may have. Usually they are dark brown, but they can be light-colored and they can be different shapes and sizes, and may be flat or raised.

What are moles made of?
These pigmented skin growths are made up of cells called melanocytes, which are the cells that produce the pigment called melanin. When we are exposed to sunlight, the melanin reacts and makes our skin darker, causing tanning. However, moles are a cluster of these melanocytic cells, and exposure to sunlight or artificial ultraviolet light (tanning beds) may sometimes trigger chemical changes resulting in skin cancer. These cancerous moles are surgically removed by a dermatologist using outpatient procedures usually done in their office.

Everyone is at risk
While some families who have a history of congenital moles and melanoma have a higher risk for developing skin cancer, everyone is at risk. Typically, skin cancer is more common in fair-skinned people with light-colored eyes, but darker-skinned individuals, while they have a lower risk, can still develop melanoma. Risk is increased among people who spend time outside without protective sunscreen; among people who had early, severe childhood sunburns; among people who have more than 50 ordinary moles; and/or among people who have a family history of melanoma.

Following the ABCDE awareness technique
Your diagnosis of dysplastic nevi means you and your doctor will monitor your skin on a regular basis. Contact your doctor immediately if you observe a change in any of the ABCDE rules listed below.

A. If you see that a mole has an uneven or asymmetric shape (one half does not match the other half).

B. If it develops or has an irregular border (a ragged or ill-defined border).

C. If it has shades, or uneven color, of red, brown, tan, blue white, or black.

D. If its diameter is greater than a pencil eraser (6mm, or ¼ inch).

E. If you observe it is an evolving or changing mole.

Take year-round protective strategies
Protecting yourself year round is essential! Did you know that snow and sand are good reflectors of the sun’s rays?

1. Always wear a sunscreen labeled for both UVB and UVA, applied 15 minutes before going outdoors.

2. Shade your face with a hat and wear sunglasses to protect your eyes.

Moles are made up of clusters of melanocytes, the pigment cells that produce melanin, which causes skin to tan when exposed to sunlight.
3. Minimize outdoor exposure between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.

4. Wear protective clothing to keep the sun off sensitive areas – shirts with long sleeves, gloves and trousers.

Learn more and stay informed
Here are some good resources to learn more about taking care of the largest organ your body has—your skin!

emedicine.medscape.com/article/1056283-overview

www.webmd.com/skin-problems-and-treatments/screening-moles-cancer

www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/moles

Headquartered in Irving, Texas, Inform Diagnostics provides the highest-quality anatomic pathology services, primarily in the fields of breast pathology, dermatopathology, hematopathology, gastrointestinal pathology, and urologic pathology. The company’s team of nearly 90 pathologists—all fellowship-trained subspecialists—utilize state-of-the-art laboratories throughout the United States to serve more than 5,000 patients every day. Inform Diagnostics continuously improves diagnostic precision through a unique consensus approach, rigorous quality assurance, comprehensive expertise, ongoing education and research, and close relationships with our clinician clients. Find more patient information and resources on our website at www.InformDiagnostics.com.