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Naevi (birthmarks)

What are naevi?

Congenital naevi or birthmarks are essentially coloured skin markings that develop before or shortly after birth. Benign developmental skin lesions that develop later in life are called 'acquired' naevi.

Naevi may be derived from the outside layers of the skin (epithelial naevi) or from the deeper layers (dermal/subcutaneous naevi). Naevi are further classified based on the cell type involved. Melanocytic and vascular naevi are generally the most common types of birthmarks.

Epithelial naevi	Dermal/subcutaneous naevi
<p>Melanocytic naevi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congenital melanocytic naevi • Acquired naevi (moles) • Blue naevi • Halo naevi • Naevus of Ito & naevus of Ota • Spitz naevus • Mongolian spot 	<p>Vascular naevi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haemangiomas • Capillary malformations • Venous malformations • Lymphatic malformations
<p>Epidermal naevi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epidermal naevi (linear & systematised) • Becker naevus (pigmented hairy epidermal naevus) • Inflammatory linear verrucous epidermal naevus • Linear porokeratosis • Sebaceous naevus (organoid naevus) 	<p>Connective tissue naevi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collagenoma • Elastomas • Elastosis perforans serpiginosa • Congenital smooth muscle hamartoma • Fat naevus (naevus lipomatosis) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Michelin tyre baby" • Congenital fibromatosis • Mucinous naevus
<p>Follicular naevi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comedone naevus • Basal cell naevus with comedones 	<p>Other developmental defects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aplasia cutis • Mastocytoma • Dermoid cyst • Thyroglossal cyst • Bronchogenic cyst

What causes naevi?

Naevi are caused by visible clusters of cells in the skin. Vascular naevi are due to clusters of blood vessels, melanocytic naevi are due to clusters of pigmented skin cells (melanocytes), epidermal naevi to keratinocyte skin cells and so on. The exact cause of why these occur is unknown but it may relate to localised abnormalities of certain genes. There is no known way to prevent them.

What treatment is available?

See individual birthmark types for specific treatment options.

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DermNet does not provide an on-line consultation service.
If you have any concerns with your skin or its treatment, see a [dermatologist](#) for advice.

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