

# ATTENTION TO OUR SKIN

By John Benzaquen

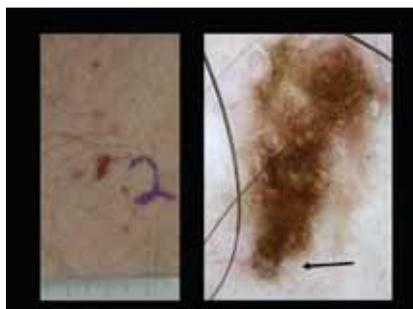
**A** Stitch in time saves nine aptly describes the need to take care of one's health because timely treatment of any malady can prevent its spread.

This is especially true of skin cancer professionally known as Malignant Melanoma of the Skin or MMS for short. In the past years it has been spreading rapidly. During the years 1980-2006 the number of Israelis who have been affected by this cancer of the skin has tripled and for women it has doubled. On a per capita basis Israel has the largest number of skin cancer patients after Australia and New Zealand.

MMS is caused in part by heredity and it is more common with those who have light skin with fair complexions. But it is also helped along by the very strong sun. It is no wonder that the Antipodes and Israel have on, a per capita basis the most cancer skin patients in the world. All three have fair skinned populations and a strong tropical sun.

Dr. Nir Nathansohn, a dermatologist who specializes in MMS, explains that it can be a very dangerous malady, "Melanoma when confined to the skin is not a mortal disease, but when it reaches a stage where metastases spread to other organs, there is no effective treatment. And that is the reason why early detection is so important".

MMS develops from cells called melanocytes, the cells responsible for the color of our skin. When those cells are grouped together one gets a mole, otherwise known as beauty



A normally looking mole (left) reveals a melanoma by the dermoscope (right).

spot, or "nevus" in Latin. A large number of such moles are the vivid sign that a person is at high risk to develop MMS which means that they should be analyzed at frequent intervals and if necessary take the necessary treatment.

In the not so distant past the nature of the moles was determined by the naked eye of the dermatologist and if in doubt a biopsy was performed. This method resulted in wrong diagnosis. In addition skin biopsies have side effects since they create scars.

Dr. Nathansohn has a private clinic called The MoleMap Center in the Herzliya Medical Center which can analyze suspect growths in the skin and determine if they are cancerous or not with the most cutting edge technologies. At these times technology has made big strides in diagnosing MMS and the MoleMap Center in Herzliya is equipped with the latest technology in this field, namely "mole mapping". Mole mapping is a system which simplifies early diagnosis of MMS. It consists of 2 interrelated methods- dermoscopy and total body photography (TBP).

A dermoscope is an optical instrument, with which to conduct a non invasive diagnosis of individual moles. As Dr. Nathansohn explains, "The dermoscope allows dermatologists to see the infrastructure of individual moles much more clearly. Whereas the naked eye misses up to 40% of melanomas, with the dermoscope we can correctly diagnose 90% of melanomas at an early, curable stage".

After each mole is checked with a dermoscope, very high definition digital photos are taken of the whole patient's body. In addition close-up and dermoscopic photos of the suspicious moles are also taken. When a healthy mole becomes cancerous it changes its shape, size or color or a new mole appears. In consequence the most objective, reliable method of detecting such changes is long-term follow up with TBP. The whole process, takes about an hour, is repeated every year, and the images (both TBP and dermoscopic images) are compared to detect changes.

Mole mapping has been proved worldwide as a method that can reliably detect melanomas at an early stage, while greatly reducing the number of scars left over by unnecessary biopsies.

The mole mapping process is the stitch in time that can well save nine. ■

*For further information  
please visit website [www.molemap.co.il](http://www.molemap.co.il)  
or call Herzliya Medical Center at  
09-9592555 extension 3*