

Don't Try This at Home

From cooking chicken in Nyquil to storing avocados in water and everything in between, the social media app TikTok has had its fair share of “health hack” videos that have gone viral in recent months. Now, a new “hack” is trending on the app, prompting medical experts to once again warn individuals about: at-home mole removals.

The main reason people are attempting to remove moles on their own is for cosmetic purposes. However, not only can attempting to remove a mole at home lead to infection, but it probably won't work as intended.

Anne Orzechowski, Family Medicine Advanced Practice Nurse, OSF HealthCare

“If it's not in a clean environment it can create a large area for infection to grow, which can lead to needing antibiotics and further scarring. I think removing a mole at home would just cause the opposite effect of what you're looking for.” (:19)

Some people are uploading videos of themselves getting rid of a mole at home by cutting off the circulation to it, using things around the house such as a rubber bands or string. One video in particular that has been liked by nearly 400,000 people shows a woman who uses a bobby pin to remove a mole on her face, leaving the bobby pin on the mole until it flattens, then using baking soda to “dry it out,” and proceeds to pull off the mole after a couple days.

Other individuals are searching online stores like Amazon to find ointments or other tools being marketed as safe to use at home. Because these are being sold for the purpose of at-home mole removals, people believe the products to be safe. These, however, are not recommended by medical professionals. Orzechowski warns techniques like these should be avoided at all costs. Furthermore, any skin tags or moles removed at home will not be properly tested and screened.

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“If you remove a mole at home, it usually has deep roots, so if you're just going to shave across the top of it you are not going to achieve the cosmetic look you want. But most importantly, when a provider removes a mole they send it off to pathology. A doctor looks at the cells under a microscope and makes sure it's not cancer. So the biggest thing you're missing when you remove a mole at home is that you're not making sure that it's not cancer.” (:31)

Even if you plan to see a dermatologist in the future, Orzechowski says to avoid trying to remove anything at home prior to your appointment. Instead, take note of any particular lesions, growths, or spots that are bothering you or are concerning to you, and your doctor can assess at your scheduled visit.

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“If you scoop off or shave part of a mole it may then look differently. So if you do have a cancerous mole that you try to remove yourself it will look different, and a dermatologist in the future may not be able to see it properly,” (:16)

If you have a mole or skin growth that you do not like and want to have it removed solely for cosmetic purposes, it is still important to make an appointment with a dermatologist or talk to your primary care provider for a referral. Skin cancer comes in many shapes and sizes so it is impossible to know for certain whether a lesion on your skin is truly benign.

The most important thing is detecting any skin cancers early, and having any potentially cancerous spots checked and removed properly by a medical professional.

If you have any spots that are not raised or easily noticeable, you should still have those checked as well – especially if they are changing or look different than other spots on your skin. Some forms of skin cancer are not as apparent as others, so annual skin checks are important for that reason.

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“If you have any moles that are larger or growing, are irregular in size, or have different coloring to them, it's important to get them checked by a provider so they can ensure you don't have skin cancer. You can also then get them removed by a licensed professional.” (:19)

The bottom line? When scrolling through your feed on TikTok, use it only for entertainment purposes. Leave mole removals or any other health-related “hacks” you may find to the professionals.