

How to take good photos (of moles, lumps & bumps)

This quick guide has been written to help you provide the doctor with the best possible photos. The better the photos, the more accurate the doctor can be with their diagnosis. Getting it right the first time also helps prevent delays and the need to contact you to re-submit photos.

Please be aware that the most accurate diagnoses are given when the submitted photographs include images taken through a device called a dermatoscope. Dermatoscopes are often very expensive to purchase and almost always require you to use your smartphone so skindoc. is currently designing its own one. Until then, feel free to submit photographs but you should familiarise yourself with our Terms & Conditions where we explain the service you should expect, in greater detail.

If you are happy to proceed on this basis, let's begin.

There are two stages here. The first stage (A) shows you how to take both a standard photo and a close-up photo. The second stage (B) shows you how to take microscopic images. You only need to read this section if you have a dermatoscope.

Stage A

The first photo we need is a standard photo which includes the skin around the lesion(s). For example, if you have a worrisome mole on the middle of your forearm we need a photo of your entire forearm first. This helps us identify the condition of the surrounding skin but also helps in confirming its location.

After that, we need a close-up image of the lesion. This should be taken a few centimetres away from your skin.

If the lesions you are concerned about are spread over your body then we would need a standard and close-up photo for each one. If they are clustered in one area we do not need repeat standard photos, just the close-ups.

Step One – Prepare your skin

First wipe off any creams, make-up or anything else that may obscure the true nature of the skin problem.

Step Two – Assistance

Ask someone to help if the rash is in an awkward place or you cannot steadily hold your phone/camera with two hands.

Step Three – Lighting

Ensure you are taking photos in a well-lit area. Natural light is best.

Step Four – Remove Distractions

Remove distracting items e.g. jewellery, wristwatches, etc. Move or remove clothing which hides the area being photographed.

Step Five – Neutral Background

Take photos against a neutral background e.g. a single coloured wall or countertop. Avoid busy wallpapers and lots of background colour.

Step Six – Steady your Camera

Open your smartphone camera app or digital camera and steady with both hands.

Step Seven – Orientation

Orient the camera parallel to your skin; try to avoid angling up or down.

Step Eight – Focus

Focus your camera and capture the photo (e.g. on smartphones you can touch your phone to auto-focus). Retake the picture if it's blurry.

When you are happy with your standard and close-up photos (one of each) then move on to Stage B. If you don't have a dermatoscope you do not need to do Stage B and can upload your photos now.

Stage B

This section is for patients that have a dermatoscope to hand. It is best to read the entire instructions before starting as it can be a little fiddly!

If you have a smartphone case/protector you will need to **remove it** before starting.

Step One – Attach the Dermatoscope

With your smartphone camera app open, turn the dermatoscope light on and attach the device so it covers the main camera lens. You will need to adjust it so the circle is in the middle of the screen.

When in position, zoom in slightly - you only want to do this a little bit, just to get the black borders out of the frame. Now turn **OFF** the flash.

Step Two – Prepare the area

Remove any surface crust or scale from the areas being photographed using some tape (e.g. Micropore™ or equivalent). Next, place a very small amount of clear lubricating gel (or water if using around the eyes) over the area and remove any excess – this enhances the image.

Place the dermatoscope lightly over the lesion. Try not to press or apply pressure as it distorts the skin and squashes the tiny blood vessels.

Step Three – Steady & Orientate

Steady the camera with both hands and orient it parallel to your skin; try to avoid angling up or down.

Step Four – Focus

Focus your camera (touch your camera phone screen) and take the photo. Retake the picture if it's blurry.

Step Five – Repeat (only for moles)

Now that we have pictures of the worrying lesion, we need pictures of some normal looking ones to compare. Pick one or two that have stayed the same, not bothered you and generally look most like your other moles.

Step Six – Upload

Now that you have taken the photos, pick the best ones and upload. If you are completing the questionnaire on your smartphone or tablet then the link will automatically connect to your photo gallery. If not, you may need to transfer the images to your laptop or PC via Bluetooth/Airdrop, cable, or email.