DERMOSCOPY

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Dermoscopy is a non-invasive technique used by dermatologists and other trained physicians to assess different types of skin lesions. It is also known as dermatoscopy, epiluminescence microscopy, incident light microscopy, or skin surface microscopy. This technique requires the use of a hand-held device called the dermatoscope that allows detailed visualization of the skin surface. It acts as a magnifying glass with illumination and helps examine characteristics of skin that are otherwise not visible to the naked eye.

Dermoscopy is primarily used as a tool for evaluating benign and malignant skin lesions. During an annual skin check, the dermatologist may take a closer look at any unusual nevi (moles) using the dermatoscope. Studies have shown that it helps identify melanomas earlier and with better diagnostic accuracy. Numerous unique dermoscopic patterns of melanomas and moles have been recognized and help direct management based on the tumor type. Dermoscopy magnifies certain key characteristics of skin lesions such as symmetry, pigment distribution, vascularity and color. It is used to distinguish between basal cell carcinoma, hemangioma, seborrheic keratosis and others. This early visual diagnosis reduces the need for unnecessary biopsies of benign lesions.

This technique is also useful in optimizing diagnosis and management of various infectious and inflammatory skin disorders. Dermoscopy enhances the detailed inspection of skin, hair and nails when evaluating lesions such as psoriasis, scabies and lichen planus. There is a specific term for dermoscopic examination of hair and scalp lesions called trichoscopy. It’s a quick and non-invasive method to diagnose and monitor various hair disorders.

Overall, dermoscopy has proven to be an essential component of the dermatologist’s tool box. It helps establish an earlier and more accurate clinical diagnosis and can decrease unnecessary biopsies. With advancing technology, you may notice your dermatologist using a dermatoscope with a smartphone or iPad adaptor that can digitally store images in order to monitor lesions over time.