

# allure

THE BEAUTY EXPERT

MAY 2006

SPECIAL ISSUE

**C**You know you're supposed to check your moles for changes, but you have about a zillion of them. That constellation of spots is definitely Pleiades. Or possibly Orion. Or maybe Ursa Minor. The same confusion that overcomes amateur after-dinner astronomers can grip anyone who has wrestled with a hand mirror to assess the skin—and moles—on her back. The average person has 10 to 40 moles, Klein says; those who have many more should consider "mole mapping," a process where a series of photographs of the body is taken by the dermatologist or by a medical photographer and are compared from visit to visit with a computer. "It's very helpful in identifying new skin growths or skin cancer," Kauffman says. However, "it's expensive, about \$500, and often not covered by insurance." If that gives you sticker shock, Leffell points out that, "the best computer is still between the ears of the dermatologist and the patient. Patients often have a sixth sense of when a mole is abnormal."

The marks of an abnormal mole are known as ABCDE—asymmetric shape, border irregularities, color that's not uniform, diameter larger than a pencil eraser, and evolution from how it has looked in the past. "Women should know their skin the same way they should know their breasts," Matarasso says. "If you found a lump in your breast, you'd go to the doctor immediately. If you notice something different about a mole, get to a dermatologist—don't tell me that your masseur told you it looked OK."

#### What's the difference between a freckle and a mole, both in definition and cancer risk?

In showbiz terms, Lindsay Lohan has freckles; Eva Mendez has a mole. In science-class lingo, a freckle is a superficial cluster of melanin—"a UV-light



A day by the pool calls for sun protection with muscle—choose a broad-spectrum formula with zinc, titanium dioxide, or avobenzone.

**26%**  
of women report getting  
sunburned last summer.

—American Academy of Dermatology

injury to the skin," Rodan says. "Freckles by themselves do not become cancerous, but they are a red flag that you have received more sun exposure than your skin can take and are therefore in general prone to skin cancer."

In contrast to freckles, a mole, or nevus, "is a deeper lesion and can have cancer potential, but it's usually very low," Tanzi says. Indeed, a mere 10 percent of melanomas start as moles, while 90 percent appear from the very beginning as melanoma (irregular, sometimes crusty, discolored patches of skin). "And the one thing you can do to prevent more moles," Kauffman says, "is to stay out of the sun."