A hazy pigmented lesion

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The diagnosis of pigmented lesions is a daily challenge in general practice. Dermatoscopy can provide extra clues, but requires significant expertise. Here is a case that will help you hone your skills.

Case presentation

A 29-year-old woman had a longstanding 6 mm diameter irregularly pigmented mole on her upper back (Figure 1). Dermatoscopy of the mole revealed hazy pigmentation with an asymmetrical pattern and a focally hyperpigmented focus at the upper right edge. There was an irregular pigment network with patchy small diameter mesh. The network at the periphery blended with the surrounding freckles (Figure 2). Excision biopsy of the lesion revealed an epidermis with a prominent elongated rete ridge system, which projected into the dermis as an anastomosing network (Figure 3). There were uniform pigmented melanocytes at the epidermal junction, and melanocytes were also present as clusters of small focally pigmented cells in the upper dermis.

Diagnosis

The biopsy findings indicated that the lesion was a benign compound naevus.

Discussion

The asymmetrical patchy pigmentation and the irregular pigment network prompted removal of the mole, as it appeared clinically atypical. The biopsy findings, however, were those of a benign and nondysplastic mole. The hazy appearance of the lesion under dermatoscopy is due to the bridging and anastomosing network of the pigmented rete ridges, together with the presence of pigmented nests of benign melanocytes within the superficial papillary dermis creating patchy pigmentation.

Keypoint

Benign compound naevi may appear atypical clinically and on dermatoscopy because of blending of the pigment in elongated and irregular epidermal ridges and superficial melanocytic nests. However, this combination of features is entirely benign. MT

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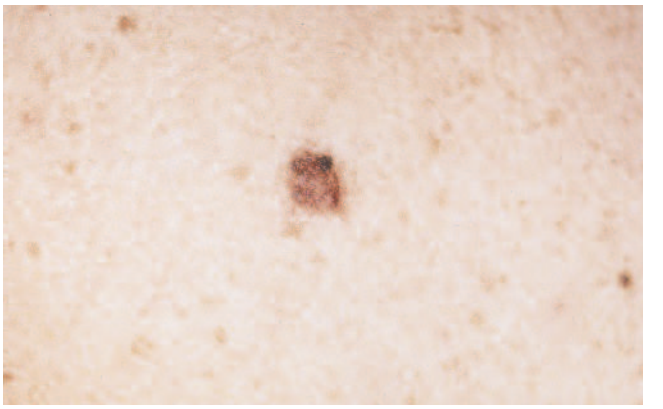

Figure 1. An irregularly pigmented mole on the upper back.

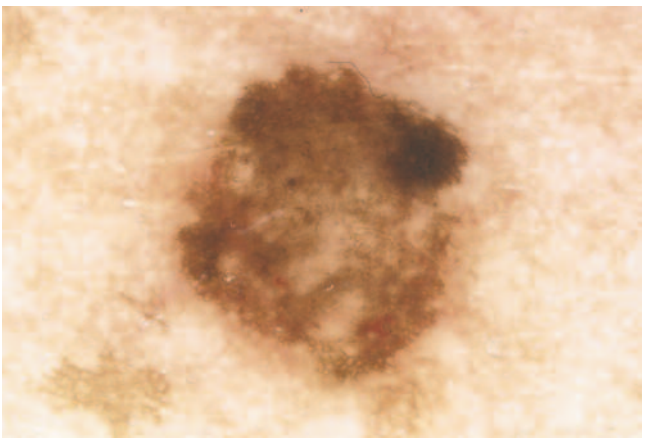

Figure 2. Dermatoscopy showing asymmetrical distribution of pigment with hyperpigmented focus, irregular but fine pigment network and hazy tan–brown areas with pale patches.

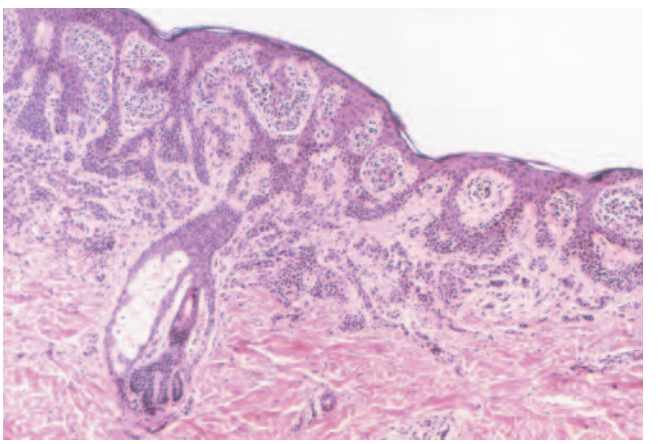

Figure 3. Excision biopsy demonstrating an elongated and complex rete ridge system, increased numbers of melanocytes and nests of pigmented melanocytes within the mid and upper dermis.