



Cancer survivorship information for patients and carers



Follow-up of survivors of early-stage melanoma

Introduction

What is melanoma?

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer. It most commonly develops in pigmented skin cells (melanocytes) on a part of the body that has been exposed to the sun. Rarely, it can develop on other parts of the skin.

In Australia, melanoma is the most common cancer affecting people aged 15–39 years.

What are the statistics relating to survival after treatment?

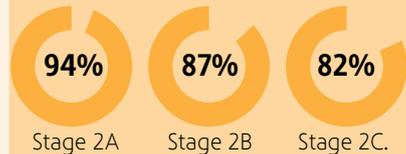
In Australia:



Survival rates for people who have been treated for Stage 1 melanoma are 99% at one, three and five years.

THIS MEANS that for every 100 people treated for Stage 1 melanoma, 99 will be cancer free five years later.

Five-year survival rates for people who have been treated for Stage 2 melanoma are:



THIS MEANS that for every 100 people treated for Stage 2 melanoma, most will be cancer free five years later.

It is very common for melanoma survivors to be fearful that the cancer may come back. Survivors can also often face issues with their emotional wellbeing. Finding a 'new normal' can also be challenging.

Cancer touches a person's whole life. It can deeply affect carers, family and friends.

Who this fact sheet is for

This fact sheet is for people diagnosed with early-stage melanoma (Stages 0 to 2). Early-stage melanoma is melanoma that has not progressed to the lymph nodes or distant organs.

Your doctor will be able to tell you what stage your melanoma is.

We recognise a 'cancer survivor' as someone diagnosed with cancer. This fact sheet is for survivors who have completed their active treatment for early-stage melanoma, and for their family, friends and carers.

This fact sheet is not designed for survivors who have been treated with immunotherapy or radiation, who should seek advice from their treating team.

Risk factors for melanoma

These factors mean a person is more likely to develop melanoma:

- age (it is more common in people aged over 60 years)
- degree of sun damage from unprotected ultraviolet (UV) radiation exposure
- many and/or irregular or large moles
- fair complexion and/or hair
- a family history.

How we can help

Each person adjusts to life after cancer in their own way. It is important that you receive the right information and support at the right time. The Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre (ACSC) has developed information resources and events for you, which can be accessed here; petermac.org/services/support-services/cancersurvivorship/survivors-and-carers

Key messages

- Cancer survivors experience a range of issues and unique challenges – physical, emotional, social and practical.
- More Australians survive a diagnosis of melanoma today than 30 years ago, due to increased awareness and screening efforts, earlier diagnosis and improved treatments.
- After treatment has finished, it is very important that you have regular follow-up with your GP or dermatologist and regularly check your skin.
- Appropriately treated early-stage melanoma has high survival rates.
- It is normal to be concerned about cancer coming back.
- A survivorship care plan will help you to navigate your time after finishing treatment.



Alison's story

Alison Button-Sloan, a cancer survivor and nurse, was diagnosed with a large primary nodular melanoma that required surgery. Alison is now an educator and advocate for melanoma patients.

For Alison, and many other melanoma survivors, it is the fear of her cancer coming back that interferes with her quality of life. She encourages others to talk to their doctors about their concerns.

To read more about Alison's experience as a melanoma cancer survivor, visit this our survivor stories at petermac.org/services/cancer-information-resources/survivor-stories



Pathway after treatment

Who will assist me with my follow-up?

Your GP may be the right person to look after your follow-up, your specialist may wish to oversee your follow-up or your care may be shared between your GP and specialist. If you are not sure who will take care of your follow-up, ask your treating doctor.

What follow-up is recommended after treatment?

Early detection of melanoma is important for a successful treatment outcome. Self-examination and examination by a doctor will increase the likelihood of early detection if a cancer recurs.

See the recommended follow-up schedule in the table.

Follow-up schedule for early-stage melanoma

 Examine your skin and lymph nodes regularly (every 1–3 months). Your treatment team will advise you how to do this (there are also tips below).

 Have a skin examination every three to 12 months by your GP or dermatologist.

This is a guide only. Your doctor can give you more details of your follow-up plan.

How do I self-examine my skin?

Following treatment, you must regularly examine your whole body for spots or lumps that may be melanoma. Early detection increases your chance of successful treatment.

Make sure to check your skin from head to toe for spots or lumps, including nail beds and non-exposed areas such as your armpit and groin.

You may do this either by yourself or with the help of someone else. Ask a friend or family member to look at areas you cannot see, like your back.

Because melanoma can appear in many shapes and sizes, it is important to know what to look for when checking your skin. With any pigmented spots, the rule to remember is ABCDE:

- **A**symmetry – if you were to put a line through the middle, do both sides look different?
- **B**order – does the outer rim appear irregular?
- **C**olour – are there many different colours on the spot?
- **D**iameter – is the spot growing or larger than 6 mm?
- **E**volving/elevation – is the spot changing with time? Is it itching or bleeding? Is the skin crusting and bulging?

Another method is looking for any mole or spot that looks different to your other moles and spots, 'the ugly duckling'. Follow to the EFG rule, look out for moles that are Elevated, Firm, or Growing.

If you answered yes to any of the ABCDE features during a self-check (especially if the spot is changing), you should see your GP urgently for a review.

It is important to keep in mind that this is only a guideline and does not cover all types of melanoma.

For a detailed walkthrough of the steps, please see a video from the Global Coalition for Melanoma Patient Advocacy, which you can view [by scanning the QR Code](#).



If you feel concerned about your health, ask your doctor or nurse for further advice.



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Will I have imaging tests?

No test can reliably detect melanoma or its likelihood of recurrence.

Imaging such as computed tomography (CT) or positron emission tomography (PET) scans are not routinely recommended following treatment of early-stage melanoma. For Stage 2C melanoma, imaging may be considered.

If a new cancer is suspected or diagnosed, you may be referred to a specialist service for further investigations.

How can I protect my skin from sun damage?

It is essential for melanoma survivors to use a combination of recommended sun protection measures.

Use the SunSmart mobile phone app or weather forecast to check UV levels and take precautions when the UV index is 3 or higher, which is typically the months outside winter in the southern areas of Australia and all year round above this. Aim to avoid times when there are high UV radiation levels

as UV rays can damage skin cells and increase the risk of skin cancer.

Wear a hat which protects your face, neck and ears, lightweight UV resistant long sleeve shirt and pants when outside in warmer weather. Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 50 for protection.

The Cancer Council suggests [five ways you can protect yourself from skin cancer](http://www.sunsmart.com.au) (www.sunsmart.com.au).



Slip



Slop



Slap



Seek



Slide

In some cases, protecting your skin from sun damage can lead to not having enough vitamin D. Your GP can check your vitamin D level and supplement any deficiencies.

These images have been reproduced with permission from SunSmart Prevention at Cancer Council Victoria.

Wellness after cancer

What issues do survivors commonly experience?

For early-stage melanoma survivors, issues may include:

- concerns around scarring and body image after surgery
- low mood
- fear of cancer recurrence
- anxiety about sun exposure
- worry about developing a new cancer
- concerns for family members and their risk of developing melanoma.

To learn more about these issues and self-management tips visit our [Common Survivorship Issues Directory](#).

What can I do to improve my physical and mental wellbeing?

The following suggestions may help.



Develop a regular routine of activities



Connect with friends and family



Rediscover your hobbies and interests



Practise yoga and mindfulness



Quit smoking



Cut down on alcohol



Enjoy a nutritionally balanced diet



Achieve a healthy body weight for your height



Get moving and exercise – at least 30 minutes of moderate level exercise on five days of the week is recommended



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I am worried that I will develop another cancer or my cancer will recur. Is this normal?

Having had a cancer, including melanoma there is risk of developing a recurrence later in life. It is normal to worry about the cancer coming back. About 75% of cancer survivors share this fear. You can seek information about prognosis and the likelihood of recurrence for your melanoma from your treatment team.

It is important that these fears or concerns do not affect your mental wellbeing. Symptoms to look out for include low mood, constant worry about your health, requesting multiple scans/investigations, poor sleep, feelings of hopelessness, no desire for hobbies or socialising, reduced concentration and changes to appetite or weight. If you find these thoughts affect you and your relationships, seek professional help or see your GP who can provide further support and advice and may refer you to a psychologist or counsellor. Your GP may discuss a mental health care plan with you.

Therapy such as mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) can improve quality of life and help you deal with fear of recurrence and feelings of

uncertainty. Look for free mobile phone apps such as 'Headspace – meditation and sleep', which can help you practise mindfulness at home.

My cancer is affecting others around me. What support is available for them?

Family, friends and carers are important in supporting and caring for cancer survivors. This can often take a physical and emotional toll on them. It is important for families and carers to care for themselves and have a support system.

Support services for carers and friends include:

- [Carer Gateway](http://carergateway.gov.au) (carergateway.gov.au)
- [Carers Australia](http://carersaustralia.com.au) (carersaustralia.com.au)
- [Centrelink Carer Payment and/or Carer Allowance](http://servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/carers) (servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/carers)
- [Cancer Council – Family and Friends](http://cancerCouncil.com.au/cancer-information/for-family-and-friends/) (cancerCouncil.com.au/cancer-information/for-family-and-friends/)

For further free, confidential support, call Cancer Council **13 11 20** or Melanoma Patients Australia Support Line at **1300 88 44 50**.

Survivorship care plans

A survivorship care plan (SCP) is a formal, written document developed by your care team with and for you. A SCP is likely to contain general information about you, a treatment summary, a follow-up care plan, and a wellness plan to promote recovery and achieve your health goals. A SCP can be used to improve communication between you, your family and carers, and your medical team.

Together with your doctor, you can continue to adjust your SCP. It should be designed to help your recovery, allowing you and your doctor to focus on the health goals that matter the most.

myCarePlan.org.au includes early-stage melanoma. You will be able to create a personalised SCP, giving you a better understanding of life after treatment for early-stage melanoma.

Helpful resources

Resources

- Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre: Practical ways of coping with cancer petermac.org/services/cancer-information-resources/coping-cancer-emotions-side-effects
- Cancer Council Victoria: Healthy living after cancer program cancervic.org.au/living-with-cancer/life-after-treatment/healthy-living-after-cancer
- Common Survivorship Issues Directory petermac.org/survdirect
- Melanoma Institute Australia: How do I check myself for melanoma? melanoma.org.au/preventing-melanoma/how-do-i-check-myself-for-melanoma/
- Melanoma Patients Australia: Support options melanomapatients.org.au/support/support-options/
- Exercise is Medicine Australia: Evidence-based resources about exercise recommendations exerciseismedicine.com.au/factsheets/

Helplines and support groups

- Cancer Council **13 11 20**
- Melanoma Patients Australia, National Melanoma Support Helpline | **1300 884 450**
- Melanoma Institute Australia (Vic, NSW) | **(02) 9911 7200**
- melanomaWA | **(08) 9322 190**
- Dietitians Australia daa.asn.au | **1800 812 942**
- Australian Psychological Society psychology.org.au | **1800 333 497**

Acknowledgment

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