



What to expect during each stage of treatment and beyond

## Melanoma

This information sheet tells you what you can ask for before, during and after your melanoma treatment. You can ask your team for more information and support.

Working with your team means you can make sure you are getting the treatment, information and support that are right for you.

### 1. Your doctor visit

Your doctor will look at any spots or moles that are unusual, change or grow quickly. They might use a dermoscope so they can see them more clearly. The dermoscope will magnify the spot or mole so it is larger. Your doctor should take a photograph and measurement, and talk to you about what to look for between visits.

Your doctor should work with you to make sure you have the information and help you need. You can ask your doctor about what will or might happen. You can ask for more information and support.

Your doctor might do a test on the spot or mole to see if it is cancer. In some cases your doctor might send you to a specialist to do the test (for example, if your spot or mole is in an unusual place).

#### Excisional Biopsy

The spot or mole and a small area around it will be cut out, and the area stitched up.

This is called a biopsy. This sample is sent to the laboratory so they can see if it is skin cancer. This is done under anaesthetic so you cannot feel it.

If you do have a melanoma you might have another surgery to create what is called a safety margin. This is where your doctor takes extra area around the spot or mole out to make sure it is all removed. If they can take it all out, you might not need any more treatment.

Your doctor might send you to get more tests with a specialist if they haven't already. Your specialist will be a dermatologist or surgeon. They are doctors that are trained in working with people with skin cancer.

**You can bring a family member or friend to your visits. You can ask your doctor for more information and support to make sure you have what you need.**

### 2. Tests

The specialist will do tests to see if you have any other melanomas or to see if the cancer has spread to other parts of your body.

The tests will show how the cancer is growing or if it has spread. This is called staging.

You can ask the specialist:

- What tests you are going to have
- What will happen in the tests
- What the tests will tell you

## 2. Tests cont'd

You might have one test or a mix of tests:

### Surgery in the specialist's office

Sometimes, your specialist might need to do another biopsy to make sure the spot or mole is all out. This is called a complete excisional biopsy.

### Sentinel lymph node biopsy

A small amount of radioactive material is injected into the area where the spot or mole was cut out. This will show the lymph node near it. The lymph node will be cut out and checked for cancer.

### Complete regional lymphadenectomy (LND)

If the melanoma has spread, the lymph nodes are cut out. This can stop the cancer spreading more.

**For most people, no treatment is needed once the spot or mole is removed. You can ask your doctor for more information and support to make sure you have what you need.**

Your doctor or specialist should talk to you about your risk for getting more skin cancers. They will make a plan so that together you can look out for any melanomas and other skin cancers if they grow.

To look at your skin cancer risk **visit** [www.scanyourskin.org/skin-cancer-risk-checklist](http://www.scanyourskin.org/skin-cancer-risk-checklist)

## 3. Treatment

If your melanoma is in an unusual position or has spread your specialist should work with a team. Your team is made up of people that understand skin cancer.

Your team will review your test results. They should ask you what you want and need. You should work together to make the best plan for your treatment.

You can ask your team:

- What treatment you are having
- Why you are having that treatment
- What will happen in that treatment
- What the treatment will do
- How long the treatment will take
- Risks and benefits of the treatment
- How you might feel during the treatment, side effects, and what you can do to feel as well as possible
- What you can expect after the treatment

Your team might suggest you take part in a clinical trial. A clinical trial is used to test a new treatment, or to see if a treatment works better than another. You can ask for more time, or a second opinion before you decide on your treatment.

Complementary therapies include things like massage, acupuncture and meditation as well as

other medicines you might take at the same time as your treatment.

Some therapies might not work well with your treatment. It is very important to talk to your team about any complementary therapies you are using, or would like to use.

You might have one treatment or a mix of treatments:

**Radiation therapy** or radiotherapy is where radiation is used to stop the cancer growing.

**Chemotherapy** or drug therapy is where drugs are used to stop the cancer growing.

It can be used if the melanoma has spread to other parts of the body. You can ask your team if chemotherapy is a good option for your melanoma.

**Biological therapy** is where drugs are injected in to the body that tells certain cells to fight the cancer.

**Targeted therapy** is where drugs are injected in to the body that attacks the cancer cells.

These therapies might be used, depending on your melanoma.

### 3. Treatment cont'd

For more information about treatment and side effects you can ask your doctor or **visit** [www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/treatment](http://www.cancer.org.au/about-cancer/treatment)

**Your team should talk to you about your needs before, during and after your treatment. You can ask for information and support at any time to make sure you have everything you need. Your team can connect you with other services and health professionals**

**to make sure you stay physically and emotionally well.**

**You can ask your doctor about finding a cancer peer support group. It can help knowing that there are other people who understand what you are going through.**

**Your friends and family can talk to a support group for carers.**

### 4. After your treatment

After your treatment is finished, your team should give you a treatment summary. Your treatment summary has all of the information on the treatment you received:

- Tests you had to diagnose your melanoma, and the results of these tests
- Treatment you had, and when you had it
- Support services and other treatment plans you received

Your team should work with you to make a plan now that your treatment is finished. Your specialist will decide which type of specialist or doctor will be best for managing your care.

You should have a follow-up plan that includes:

- The follow-up that is best for you
- Plans for managing any side effects of treatment

- How to get help quickly if you think your cancer has come back or got worse

Your doctor should work with you and talk about:

- Finding more information and support to keep physically and emotionally well, and get what you need
- Signs and symptoms to look for that might mean the cancer is coming back
- Prevention and healthy living

**Sometimes melanoma can come back after treatment. It is usually found at a follow-up visit, or if you notice any symptoms come back. It is important to have regular skin check-ups. If you notice anything different go to your doctor. It is important that your doctor shows you how to do your own skin checks.**

### 5. Living with cancer

#### Side effects

Some people get side effects during and after their treatment. Side effects are your body responding to the treatment you are having. They are normal, but can make you feel unwell. You might have side effects straight away, not at all, or months after your treatment.

You can talk to your doctor about your side effects and get information and support to help you feel well or **visit** [www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/survivors/long-term-side-effects](http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/survivors/long-term-side-effects)

#### Advance care plan

Your team might work with you to make an advance care plan. An advance care plan is

a way of setting out your wishes and making sure everyone knows what you want in future medical care. You can talk to your doctor about making an advance care plan together or **visit** [www.advancecareplanning.org.au](http://www.advancecareplanning.org.au)

#### Palliative care

Palliative care is the treatment used at different stages of your treatment to help you feel well. Palliative care can help with pain relief, to reduce your symptoms and to improve your quality of life.

You can talk to your doctor about the type of palliative care that is best for you or **visit** [www.palliativecare.org.au](http://www.palliativecare.org.au)

## 5. Living with cancer cont'd

### Cost

There are costs at every stage of your cancer including treatment, accommodation and travel. You might have costs if you are having treatment in a private health service even if you have private health insurance. You can talk to your team and your private health insurer if you have questions about the cost of each treatment you might have. You can also talk to the social worker at your hospital.

You can talk to your doctor about the cost of your treatment or **visit** [www.canceraustralia.gov.au/](http://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/)

[affected-cancer/living-cancer/dealing-practical-aspects-cancer/costs-treatment](#)

You can talk to your doctor about the cost of accommodation and travel or **visit** [www.cancercouncil.com.au/get-support/practical-support-services](http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/get-support/practical-support-services)

**There are a lot of things to think about when you have melanoma. There is also a lot of information and support. It is important that you do what is right for you. You can work with your team to make sure you have the best care.**

## Information and support

### Cancer Council

- You can talk to a cancer nurse: **13 11 20**
-  If you need an interpreter: **13 14 50**

### Carers Australia

- Information and support for carers: **1800 242 636**

For more information visit  
[www.cancerpathways.org.au](http://www.cancerpathways.org.au)



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