

Early Stage Melanoma in Adolescents & Young Adults (AYAs)

Melanoma is a type of skin cancer that can occur anywhere in the body - even areas that don't usually get much sun. Melanoma more commonly affects older adults but can affect AYAs too. Fortunately, most are early stage melanoma that hasn't spread to other parts of the body.

If you've recently been diagnosed with early stage melanoma, you've hopefully been reassured that it has an excellent survival rate. But it's likely that your cancer diagnosis has come as quite a shock and brought with it a range of emotions. It's important to know you're not alone. Lots of young people feel this way, and there are people here to support you.

The AYA Cancer Network Aotearoa have put together this melanoma guide. It covers what might happen next, things to be aware of, where to go to for more information, and the supports that are available for you.

How is early stage melanoma treated?

Most early-stage melanoma are successfully treated with surgery. By the time you are reading this, you may have already had an **excisional biopsy** where the lesion was removed and sent to a pathology laboratory for testing. It might have been followed by a wider excision to remove a small amount of surrounding skin, depending on your results.

Ask your healthcare team if your melanoma has been discussed at a melanoma MDM (multi-disciplinary meeting), where a team of specialists review and plan your care. Anyone under 25 with melanoma should be referred to one.

If you haven't yet started or completed your treatment, make sure that your healthcare team have fully explained the treatment plan that they are proposing and any risks, benefits, side-effects, and alternatives. Talk about whether you are able to have a support person with you during any procedures and what your options are for pain relief.

Most people recover well from this surgery and can return to their usual activities after a short period of healing.

What comes next?

After your melanoma has been removed, you'll have follow-up appointments to make sure your scar is healing well and to check for any signs of new melanomas. Follow-up appointments may include things like skin checks, imaging (such as ultrasound), or other tests. These can sometimes feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable at first, but your healthcare team will explain what to expect. You may also need to wait for results from time to time and it's normal to feel anxious or uncertain while you're waiting.

The frequency and length of your follow-up will be tailored just to you and depend on your risk factors, the results of medical tests, and the stage of your melanoma. The check-ups will gradually become less frequent if everything is going well.



It's always OK to ask your healthcare team questions if they use any medical terms or explanations that you are unsure of.

What do I talk about during a follow-up visit?

It's important to tell your healthcare team about any emotional or physical challenges that you're having. This is your opportunity to talk about any symptoms or concerns.

You might have questions for them. Depending on your diagnosis and treatment, these could include:

- Who will be responsible for my follow-up care and appointments and where will these take place?
- How often will I need to have follow-up appointments and what will they include?
- What are my chances of recurrence (the cancer returning)?
- How visible is my scar likely to be over time and what can I do to help it heal?
- Could my scar affect my daily life, sport, or work, and what support or strategies are available to help me manage this?
- How do I check my skin and what do I need to look out for?
- Who can I contact if I'm worried or have more questions?

You are able to bring a support person with you to your appointments. It can be helpful to write down any questions that you have ahead of time so that you don't forget them.

Other questions for my healthcare team

Helpful charitable organisations

Canteen Aotearoa: Offer a range of online and face-to-face support services for young people aged 12 – 24 who are affected by cancer. They provide free individual support sessions and therapy, and organise regular peer support events. Visit www.canteen.org.nz or phone **0800 2268 336**.

Cancer Society: Provide a range of emotional wellbeing resources to anyone aged over 18. Resources include free counselling sessions, webinars and online talks, and online support groups. Visit www.cancer.org.nz or phone **0800 226 237**. They also own and operate the sunsmart.org.nz website.

Melanoma New Zealand: Focus on melanoma prevention, detection and patient care. You can request a phone or virtual consultation with a skilled nurse using the online booking form. For helpful resources and links, visit www.melanoma.org.nz or phone **0800 4 MELANOMA** (0800 463 526)

Look Good Feel Better (LGFB): Provide a wellbeing programme for anyone with cancer at any stage. LGFB host free hands-on workshops covering topics such as skincare and makeup. They also provide online classes and on-demand videos. Visit www.lgfb.org.nz or phone **0800 865 432**.

How do I stay healthy and cancer-free?

People who have already had a melanoma are at a higher risk than the average person of developing a new melanoma. It can be a bit worrying to think about, but you can take back control by doing the following three things:

1. Self-check your skin regularly

You are often the first notice changes in your skin, so it is important for you to undertake regular self-examinations. Keep an eye on any changes in size, shape or colour of existing moles or freckles, or the development of any new ones. Ask a member of your health team to teach you how to check your skin and what to look for. You can also visit sunsmart.org.nz and melanoma.org.nz for visual guides and videos and if you notice any changes in your skin or general health, contact your GP or healthcare team as soon as possible.

2. Protect your skin

For those who have had melanoma, it is especially important to protect your skin from the sun all year round.

Wear a broad-spectrum waterproof sunscreen of at least SPF 30. Apply it 20 minutes before going outside and reapply it every two hours or more if you are in water.

Use a weather app to check the UV Index and use sun protection whenever the index is 3 or above. And always follow the SunSmart messages: **Slip, slop, slap, and wrap!**



3. Attend all your follow-up appointments with your GP or specialist team

It's really important to attend your follow-up appointments. In between appointments, and once your scheduled follow-up ends, your GP will usually be your main point of contact for any concerns



If a time doesn't suit because of school, work, or other commitments, let your healthcare team know — they may be able to offer an alternative.

How can I adapt to changes to my appearance?

Depending on their size and where they are on your body, scars from your melanoma surgery may affect your appearance. These scars may be small, or you may have large areas of skin that are affected.

If you had a skin graft or skin flap, the area around it might look and feel different (for example, a different colour or texture, and sometimes more sensitive). This will typically heal over time and any colour differences will start to fade.

It is common to find it difficult to adjust if you have had a change in your appearance after surgery. At first, you may feel more self-conscious than you did before. Make sure that you treat yourself with compassion and kindness. Who you are is so much more than how you look.

Who can I talk to?

A melanoma diagnosis can have both a physical and emotional impact. It's not uncommon to experience feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, or disbelief. You may feel fearful about your melanoma coming back. With time these emotions will often ease. Eating well, and getting enough sleep and exercise can all help.

Support is available if you need it. Try talking to a trusted friend or family member. Sharing how you're feeling can help them understand how to support you. Or you can seek support from a trained counsellor or psychologist either through your healthcare team or an organisation such as Canteen or the Cancer Society.

'Talking about your experience with loved ones and letting them know how you feel is a great way of dealing with your feelings.'

- Young person with cancer

Check out our publication 'Caring for Your Emotional Health and Wellbeing After Cancer'. It provides advice on managing any fears and worries you may have as you navigate life after cancer treatment. You can find this (and many other resources) at

www.ayacancernetwork.org.nz



Where can I learn more?

If you would like more detailed information about how melanoma develops, is diagnosed, and is treated, we highly recommend reading the Cancer Society's 'Early Stage Melanoma of the Skin' booklet available at www.cancer.org.nz and the comprehensive guide produced by Melanoma New Zealand; 'Understanding Early Melanoma' available at www.melanoma.org.nz



Checklist	Yes	No
I know the type of melanoma I was diagnosed with and what stage it is	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand my prognosis and the chance of recurrence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know who is on my treating team and their roles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am aware of how to reduce my risk of developing skin cancers in the future	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have been shown how to check my skin for changes and told how regularly I should do this	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel confident checking my skin and know what changes to look out for	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand what my follow up plan is and who to contact if I have questions or concerns	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am aware of the resources and support services that are available for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>