

Melanoma: Follow up care and cancer in remission

(leaflet 6 of 7)

Patient information from the British Association of Dermatologists

Produced for National Cancer Patient Information Pathways, National Cancer Action Team



Melanoma leaflets in this series, produced by the British Association of Dermatologists:

1. Prevention and risk factors
2. Symptom awareness and early detection
3. Referral, tests and investigations
4. Diagnosis and staging
5. Treatments
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7. Advanced disease and recurrence

After your operation to remove the melanoma, you may need to be followed up regularly in the outpatient clinic. There are four main reasons for this:

- To make sure the tumour has not come back or spread.
- To detect any other skin cancers.
- To provide you with support and information.
- To advise you how to recognize any possible skin cancers yourself in the future.

At the clinic your scar will be checked, and your neck, groin and armpits will also be examined for lumps to detect any spread to the lymph nodes (glands).

Any other moles that you are concerned about will be examined and, if you have large numbers of moles, these will be looked at too. Photographs of these moles may be taken and kept in your hospital notes. When you come back to the clinic, this record will allow your doctors to compare the way your moles look now with how they looked before.

If your melanoma was at a very early stage when it was removed, you may need to be seen only once more in the follow-up clinic. Otherwise you will be reviewed at regular intervals for at least 3 years. If you develop problems between clinic appointments, you should consult your GP who will arrange for an earlier hospital appointment if this is necessary.

Once your melanoma has been treated, you should be able to get back to a normal lifestyle quite quickly. You should also take a few sensible precautions to stop yourself getting another one. You should look at all areas of your skin monthly for moles that are growing or changing.

As you are at higher risk of developing another melanoma, you must also protect yourself from too much sun and check your skin regularly.

Top tips to protect your skin	<u>ABCD-Easy rules to mole checking</u>
<p>Protect the skin with clothing, including a hat, T shirt and UV protective sunglasses:</p>	<p>As skin cancers vary, you should tell your doctor about any changes to your skin, even if they are not similar to those mentioned here.</p>
<p>Wear long sleeves, use a hat when out in the sun, and wear long trousers rather than shorts. Use clothing with a tight weave that will block ultraviolet light. Hold the garment up to the light to see how much light the fabric's weave is letting through – this helps you to ascertain how much protection from the sun it will give you.</p> <p>Seek shade between 11am and 3pm when it's sunny.</p> <p>Use a sunscreen of at least SPF 30 which also has high UVA protection. Put it on half an hour before going out and reapply it at least every 2 hours, but don't use sunscreen as an excuse to stay out in the sun. Sunscreens should not be used instead of clothing and shade, rather they offer extra protection. No sunscreen will provide 100% protection.</p> <p>Keep babies and young children out of direct sunlight.</p> <p>Protect your eyes with sunglasses – choose ones with the 'CE Mark' and British Standard (BS EN 1836:1997) or a UV 400 label.</p>	<p>Asymmetry - the two halves of the area may differ in their shape.</p> <p>Border - the edges of the area may be irregular or blurred, and sometimes show notches.</p> <p>Colour - this may be uneven. Different shades of black, brown and pink may be seen.</p> <p>Diameter - Most melanomas are at least 6mm in diameter. Report any change in size or diameter to your doctor.</p> <p>Expert - if in doubt, check it out! If your GP is concerned about your skin, make sure you see a Consultant Dermatologist, the most expert person to diagnose a skin cancer. Your GP can refer you via the NHS.</p>

For more information, please contact: British Association of Dermatologists, 4 Fitzroy Square, London W1T 5HQ, website: www.bad.org.uk, tel: 0207 383 0266

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