

Melanoma – Your follow-up care

Patient information - Regional Plastics and Reconstruction

After surgery you will have regular check-ups. Follow-up care is very important because your risk of a new melanoma is now higher than for the average person, and melanoma can occasionally return.

How often your doctor will see you for follow-up visits depends on several factors, including the stage of the melanoma and your particular risk factors. During these visits your doctor will ask you about and check your skin for new melanoma symptoms. Your doctor will also check the original scar site for any recurrence as well as the lymph glands nearest to the scar site to ensure that the melanoma has not spread.

Approximate follow up

Stage	Follow-up
Stage I < 1 mm thick, with or without ulceration < 2 mm thick without ulceration	GP follow-up 6 monthly for 5 years.
Stage II 1 to 2 mm thick and ulcerated, or > 2 mm thick	GP follow-up 3 to 6 monthly for 5 years, depending on your prognosis. After 5 years you will have yearly follow-ups.
Stage III Nodal metastases	Specialist follow-up 3 monthly for a variable number of years, then by agreement.

Self-examination

Your doctor will ask you to participate in your follow-up care by checking your skin monthly for potential melanoma. Check for any existing or new moles that change shape, colour, itch or bleed. Self-examinations should be performed in front of a full-length mirror and/or using a hand mirror in a brightly lit room. It helps to have another person check the scalp and back of the neck. Many changes are harmless, but if in doubt contact your doctor.

While checking your skin also look for dark spots and feel for any lumps under your skin, especially where the surgery was done and in nearby lymph nodes. Your doctor will teach you how to examine your own skin. If in doubt, please ask.

- For leg melanomas, feel for nodes behind your knees and in the groin of the affected leg.

- For arm melanomas , feel for nodes in the armpit on the affected side, and the above your collarbone and on your lower neck.
- For head and neck melanomas , feel for nodes in the side of the neck, under the chin, above the collarbone, in front and behind the ears and at the back of the neck.
- For body (trunk) melanomas , feel for nodes in both armpits, both groins, above your collarbone and the nodes on your neck.

An easy way to examine yourself is to feel with a flat hand against your skin.

Many people feel this works well while bathing or showering.

Do not squeeze your skin between your fingers.

If you have any concerns, please contact your melanoma doctor or healthcare team within a few days. Do not wait until your next scheduled appointment.

Because family history plays an important role in skin cancers, your family members should also be screened for melanoma at least every year.

As the risk of recurrence decreases, the risk of a second melanoma (and other types of skin cancer) increases. This means you must continue skin cancer prevention practices, even when your follow-up visits become further apart. Be prepared to practice skin cancer prevention throughout your lifetime!

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For more information about:

- your health and medication, go to www.healthinfo.org.nz
- hospital and specialist services, go to www.cdhb.health.nz