

PATIENT GUIDE

Preparing for your appointment: Questions for your doctor and appointment checklist

This Patient Guide is designed to help you prepare for your doctors' appointments. It provides details of the things you may need to consider and questions that you may want to ask your doctor. It is unlikely that all of these questions and information will be important or relevant to you.

Our melanoma specialist nurses and nurse counsellors are available to answer your questions and guide you in preparing for appointments with your healthcare team, including identifying key questions you may want to ask your doctors and specialists. This service ensures you are not alone in navigating your melanoma journey.

National Melanoma Support Line 1300 88 44 50

Connect with Melanoma Patients Australia [Melanoma Telehealth Nurse](#) via the website

Prior to your appointment

- You may wish to read the [Optimal Care Pathway](#) for Melanoma to understand what you can expect at each stage of your treatment.
- Make a list of all the things you want to know as they come to your mind and be prepared to take this list with you to your appointment.

- Identify someone who can come to the appointment with you. It is normal to lose focus when you are given lots of new information and having a second set of ears is very helpful, as well as having someone for extra support.
- If you don't have a support person to come with you to appointments, you can ask your Cancer Care Coordinator to attend with you, or ask whether the clinic or hospital can arrange for another professional (another Cancer Care Coordinator or someone in a similar role) to sit in and take notes.
- Check your appointment time and the location of the appointment if you haven't been there before. Check how long it will take to travel to your appointment and allow extra time to prevent rushing (which can cause unnecessary stress).
- Call ahead to find out about parking location and cost, or nearest bus stop or train station.
- Have a folder or envelope to place your appointment card, referral letter and any other referral forms or test requests you may be given.
- Make a list of the medications and doses you currently take to give to the doctor or pharmacist.
- If you speak a language other than English, call ahead to request an interpreter.

Other considerations, particularly if you live in regional, rural or remote Australia

- Let your specialist know you are travelling a long way when you book, because they may be able to offer a longer appointment, coordinate tests on the same day, or help you avoid extra trips.
- When you book scans or other tests, let the clinic know you are a rural patient, try to book early, and tell them the date of your specialist appointment so your results are ready in time.
- Ask your GP, MPA specialist nurse or the Cancer Council about options for travel and accommodation support, e.g. [Patient Assistance Transport Scheme \(PATS\)](#). Completing any travel assistance forms ahead of your visit makes it easier for your doctor to review and sign. This helps avoid delays in getting your travel assistance approved.

On the day of your appointment

- Have something to eat before you go, unless you are advised not to for a procedure.
- Be prepared that you may have to wait longer than your appointment time, especially if the clinic is busy. Take a bottle of water and snacks with you and if possible, take something with you that can help you to relax and fill in time, such as a book, music, headphones, crochet, knitting, iPad (ensure it is charged).

- Take a notebook and pen, or device to take notes during the appointment, and a calendar or planner to schedule follow-up appointments.
- Ensure you have essential documents, for example:
 - Medicare card details and/or health insurance details
 - Photo ID
 - Referral letter (if required)
 - List of medications, including supplements
 - Medical history summary (including past skin checks or biopsies), if you have that information
 - Copies of recent test results, scans or pathology reports, if you have them

Other considerations, particularly if you live in regional, rural or remote Australia

- Take snacks and plenty of water if you have a long day of travel ahead.
- Take a phone charger and power bank.
- Keep travel receipts if you are eligible for reimbursement.

Questions you may want to ask your doctor

Not all of these questions will be important or relevant to you or to every doctors appointment you go to. It's normal to have lots of questions, but there may not be time to cover everything in one appointment. Prioritise the questions that matter most to you for each visit. This helps make sure your biggest concerns are addressed first.

Diagnosis

- What type of melanoma do I have?
- What is the stage of the melanoma? What does the stage mean for my treatment?
- Has the melanoma spread? If so, where has it spread? How fast is it growing?
- Are the latest tests and treatments for this type of melanoma available in my local hospital?
- Who makes the decision about my diagnosis and treatment?
- Is my case discussed by a group of specialists (Multidisciplinary Team Meeting) to decide the best treatment? [See Melanoma Patients Australia's Patient Guide – Understanding the Multidisciplinary Team \(MDT\) and the Multidisciplinary Team Meeting.\(MDM\).](#)
- Will I have access to a social worker, psychologist or dietician, or will I need to arrange support myself?
- Do you have a support nurse, nurse care coordinator or rural health navigator who will be there for me and my family throughout my treatment?

Tests I may require

- What will this test involve?
- What is the estimated out-of-pocket cost of the test?
- What will the test results tell us?
- What are the benefits and risks of having this test? Will the results affect the type of treatment I'm offered?
- Is it possible to attend any additional appointments and undergo testing within the same day?

Other considerations, particularly if you live in regional, rural or remote Australia

- What is the fastest way for me to get the tests I require?
- Can I access the necessary tests locally, or will travel be required?
- Can my tests be scheduled at times that allow for safe travel?
- How can my biopsies and other tests be coordinated to minimise unnecessary trips?
- How long will it take to receive my results, and who will review them with me?
- If I require a specialist, where is the nearest one located, and how do I obtain a referral?
- Are telehealth consultations (including teledermatology) available as an alternative to in person visits?
- If urgent tests or scans are needed, can they be prioritised?

Treatment and costs

Treatment Options and Decisions

- What treatment do you recommend?
- What is the aim of the treatment?
- Are there other treatments that might work? If not, why not?
- Will I have only one treatment or will I also have other treatments?
- How long do I have to make a decision about my treatment?
- If I am thinking of getting a second opinion, how do I do this?
- If I don't have the treatment, what should I expect?

Treatment Options and Durations

- How often will I have treatment?
- How long will treatment take?
- Will I have to stay in hospital?
- How often will I require blood tests?
- How will I know if the treatment is working?
- What if this treatment does not work?

Costs and Financial Considerations

- Are there any out-of-pocket expenses not covered by Medicare or my private health cover?
- Is there a way the cost can be reduced if I can't afford it?

Medications and Health Management

- Should I keep taking my current medications?
- Can I keep taking my nutritional supplements?
- Who do I call if I am unwell? Do you have a contact to call out of hours and at weekends?

Fertility and Genetics

- Does the treatment affect my ability to have children in the future?
- Can I still get pregnant when having treatment?
- Is there a possibility my cancer is genetic and runs in my family? Should I see a genetic specialist?

Work

- Can I still work during my treatment?

Follow up and Ongoing Care

- How often will I need to have check-ups after treatment finishes?
- Who should I go to for the check-up appointments?
- If the cancer returns, how will I know? What treatments could I have?

Support and Communication

- What other organisations exist to provide information and support me?
- Will my GP remain informed of any tests or specialist appointments?
- What role will my GP play in my care?
- How will you keep all members involved in my care informed of my healthcare needs? (e.g., communication between locums, GP, local health centre, treating team, local pharmacy).

Final Clarification

- What else do I need to know?

Other considerations, particularly if you live in regional, rural or remote Australia

- How urgent is my treatment? Is there flexibility to delay slightly while I arrange logistics?
- Will I need to temporarily relocate for treatment, and if so, for how long?
- If travel is required, how frequently will I need to go and for how long each time?
- Is it possible to receive some of my treatments (e.g. radiotherapy, immunotherapy) closer to home?
- Will I need additional scans or tests, and can these be arranged locally?
- What types of support services (e.g. financial, psychological, or social) are available to me?
- Are there supportive services available for my spouse, partner or children?
- Can you connect me with a social worker to help me navigate these issues?
- How will my treatment be coordinated between specialists and my local healthcare providers?

- Are there programs that assist with accommodation or travel costs, e.g. PATS?
- In what ways might my treatment affect my ability to work and care for my family or animals? Will I still be able to:
 - care for young children, even when they are unwell
 - care for my animals
 - continue working or attending school
 - drive long distances?
- Is it safe for me to drink and bathe using rainwater from my tank?
- Will my treatment have any impact on my septic system?
- What is the safest method for disposing of contaminated waste while undergoing treatment?

Clinical Trials

- What does taking part in a clinical trial mean?
- Are there any clinical trials or research studies I could join?
- What are the benefits and risks of these trials?
- Can I see the Participants Information and Consent Form to help me decide?
- What are my obligations if I join a clinical trial?

Other considerations, particularly if you live in regional, rural or remote Australia

- Is the clinical trial available near my home or will I need to travel?

Side Effects

- What are the risks and possible side effects of each treatment?
- What side effects should I anticipate, and can I manage them at home?
- Will the side effects improve or have lasting effects?
- Is there any side effect that I should particularly look out for?
- How can I manage side effects?
- What medications can I keep on hand to manage side effects such as pain, nausea or fever?
- Are there any complementary therapies that might help me?
- Can I have the flu, COVID-19 or other vaccines?

Final Clarification

- What else do I need to know?

Other considerations, particularly if you live in regional, rural or remote Australia

- Where is the closest hospital or medical facility equipped to handle cancer-related emergencies?
- If I experience side effects, who should I contact first, my GP, a specialist nurse or the hospital?
- If I cannot travel for urgent care and ambulance services are unavailable, are other emergency transport or telehealth options accessible?
- Can the Royal Flying Doctor Service provide assistance in these situations?

- Can my local GP or nurse assist with symptom management, or should I contact my specialist?
- Are community nurses, palliative care teams or other home-based support services available in my area?
- Is there an after-hours cancer support line I can call for advice?

If advanced cancer is diagnosed

- What's the best I can hope for by having treatment?
- Is the treatment going to improve my chance of survival?
- Are there new treatments I can try?
- What treatments can relieve my symptoms?
- Who will be responsible for my medical care?
- What help can my family and/or friends get if they care for me at home?
- What is palliative care?
- Can I have palliative care at home? How do I get it?
- Can you help me talk to my family about what is happening?
- Is there someone who can help me think about and document my wishes for future care?
- How can I ensure my wishes for future care are documented?

After the Appointment

- Document any important information and keep it in a folder.
- Read over any material provided to you.
- Note date and time of your next appointment in your diary or phone.
- Keep important contact numbers in a visible, easy-to-remember place, e.g. on the fridge.
- Seek clarification if there is anything you are unsure about via your medical team or [Melanoma Patients Australia](http://MelanomaPatientsAustralia).
- Share important information with those who will be supporting you, so that they also know what to do and what to expect.

Follow-up and Support Options

- Allow time to reflect on the appointment, don't expect to remember everything.
- If someone went with you, ask them to summarise what they recall from the appointment.
- Call Melanoma Patients Australia's National Melanoma Support Line (1300 88 44 50) if you would like to talk to someone, or if you need further explanation or have questions.

- Share any concerns with a trusted family member or friend, or connect with [Melanoma Patients Australia Support Programs](#) including [Support Groups](#) and Melanoma Patients Australia Facebook Group.
- Connect with the [MPA Nurse Telehealth Service](#) ([Melanoma specialist nurses and melanoma nurse counsellors](#)). Whether you need reassurance, practical advice or help framing questions for your next consultation, the Nurse Telehealth Service provides compassionate, professional support tailored to your needs.

Connecting with Melanoma Patients Australia Support Programs

Melanoma Support Line 1300 88 44 50

Connect with other patients through [Melanoma Patients Peer Support Programs](#) via the website

Connect with Melanoma Patients Australia [Melanoma Telehealth Nurse](#) via the website

The information contained in this resource is intended to be a guide. Every patient is different and will have different experiences, the information contained in this resource will not apply to all patients. This information is not aimed specifically to an individual and it is therefore important that patients always consult their specialist doctor or other medical professional (e.g., General Practitioner) about any specific matters affecting their individual treatment and care. The information in this guide is not intended to replace medical information or substitute the formal professional advice or your supportive care team. Melanoma Patients Australia exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by using or relying on the information provided in this resource.

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