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Care after skin
Cancer
treatment



Patient information

Care after skin cancer treatment



Excellent patient care, together

Supported self-management advice

Now you have finished your skin cancer treatment, but you will continue to be monitored. How you are followed up will depend on the stage of your melanoma.

It is important that you know signs and symptoms of recurrent cancer and are aware of how to monitor your skin and lymph nodes for any evidence of recurrence.

We offer 'personalised care' or 'supported self-managed' care through which you have direct access to the skin clinic for any skin related concerns through your keyworker, a skin cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS).

Your keyworkers are Christine Palmer and Karen O'Connell.

As part of this process, you will be asked to an interview with your skin cancer CNS to review how you are and go through in more detail some useful information that is also included in this leaflet. The appointment may be by telephone or face-to-face.

You will be able to discuss your treatment, useful information in more detail and any concerns about your skin.

Prior to the appointment you will be sent a checklist regarding your concerns so you can think about these before you come. Any concerns you have can be discussed at the appointment, the holistic needs assessment (HNA) considers your physical, social, psychological and spiritual needs as a whole.

You will still have regular face-to-face full body skin and lymph node reviews with your dermatologist. In the unlikely event that you have not received this appointment we will arrange this for you.

Dermatology follow up

- **Stage 1A** patients will only be followed up for one year
- **Stage 1B** and above will be offered appointments for five years. Your consultant will discuss the frequency with you and any scans that may be advised.

If you find anything of concern between appointments, please ring your CNS.

Tel: 01923-217209 or email: westherts.skincancercns@nhs.net

If photos are needed, they can be sent to: westherts.dermatologysecretaries@nhs.net

What you can do as part of self-monitoring

When you were diagnosed, we gave you the British Association of Dermatologists guidelines 'How to check your lymph nodes', and there is also a guidance video on YouTube <https://youtu.be/L4KexZZAdyA>.

It is recommended that once a month you take time to check your lymph nodes and do a full body check of your skin to look for any areas on your skin you are concerned about. It is helpful if you have someone who can check your back.

Melanoma can reappear locally to the area of your scar, on your scar or it may appear in the lymph nodes which will present as a lump.

What else to look for?

Most patients fear skin cancer returning and worry about their skin, and all sorts of aches and pains.

It is important to understand that you will have aches and pains, as we all do, and it is unlikely that these pains are anything to do with your skin cancer. The following information will help you to know when to seek help. Please do not sit at home worrying, we are here to help so ring us to discuss your concerns.

How to reduce the risk of recurrence

Sunscreen

The best way to reduce risk is to not let your skin burn in the sun. For more information see British Association of Dermatologist website or www.sunsmart.org.uk/.

Stay in the shade between 11am and 3pm when it's sunny, between April and September. When choosing a sunscreen look for a high protection SPF (SPF 30 or more) to protect against UVB, and for five UVA stars to protect against UVA. Apply plenty of sunscreen 15 to 30 minutes before going out in the sun, reapply every two hours and straight after swimming and towel-drying. Wearing long-sleeved clothing and a hat will give good protection to your skin. Remember to apply sunscreen to the back of your neck, hands and ears.

Vitamin D

There is growing research to show that having good levels of vitamin D help prevent serious diseases such as cancers. Sunlight is the best source for your body to produce vitamin D, however you will need to follow the sunscreen advice above. It only needs 10 minutes of sunshine a day to boost vitamin D levels, and it is advised to do this early in the morning before the sun is strong, i.e. before 10am. However, you may need to take vitamin D supplements if blood tests show your levels are very low.

Possible late side effects of treatment

Surgery

After surgery scarring, tightness, numbness, tingling sensation, itchiness, lymphoedema or long term discomfort such as localised pain are possible. If symptoms are troublesome, contact your GP or specialist nurse for advice.

Oncological treatment

After finishing treatment your oncologist will discuss any late side effects to be expected from immunotherapy or targeted therapy. As these are newer treatments, research continues to collect data on side effects. You can talk to your oncologist for advice.

Possible symptoms that will need attention

All the symptoms below can be caused by other conditions but if you are worried please contact your clinical nurse specialist. If necessary, we will investigate and hopefully be able to reassure you, but it is important to seek medical advice as the gradually worsening symptoms listed below will need to be reviewed.

Below are six symptoms that may be suggestive of skin cancer recurrence; which can take weeks, months or years to develop. If they occur please contact your CNS.

Local recurrence

A new lump or swelling around your scar, neck, above your collar bone, groin area or under your arm.

Bone pain

Pain in your back, hips or ribs that lasts consistently for two weeks, which does not respond to pain killers and keeps you awake at night. This may be a pain that needs investigating and it is worth speaking to your GP, CNS or oncologist.

Abdominal symptoms

Loss of appetite, weight loss, feeling sick or bloated, persistent diarrhoea and pain in the upper part of your abdomen, are all symptoms suggestive of a possible skin recurrence in the abdomen and may need investigating with blood tests and a CT scan.

Breathlessness or cough

Increasing breathlessness which is not related to a recent cold or flu or covid infection, a recurrent chest infection that lasts longer than three weeks, and a persistent cough, could be symptoms suggestive of a possible skin cancer recurrence affecting the lungs and may need investigating with a chest and X-ray or CT scan.

Head symptoms

Persistent headaches (particularly in the morning), double vision and a feeling of sickness, are symptoms suggestive of a possible skin cancer recurrence affecting the brain and may need investigating with a CT scan.

Arm/hand/leg swelling that may be lymphoedema

The swelling of part or whole of an affected limb is called Lymphoedema. If you notice swelling that is persistent, or if it comes and goes, it is important to seek advice early from either your CNS, GP or oncologist who can refer you to a Lymphoedema nurse specialist.

Symptoms that require urgent assessment

These are the symptoms that may occur suddenly or change quickly, and it is important that you seek urgent medical advice. If these symptoms occur out of hours, please contact your GP out of hours service or visit your local Accident and Emergency Department.

- Sudden onset of breathlessness
- Coughing up blood
- Weakness in your legs or arms
- Drowsiness or confusion
- Sudden swelling on an arm or leg

Your feelings and emotions

For some people a diagnosis of skin cancer is a very emotional and challenging time. What was normal may have changed but with time you will find a 'new normal'. Finishing treatment can bring fear and uncertainty as you are no longer having as much contact with health professionals. When treatment ends it can result in a mixture of emotions, and it is natural for some to have feelings of insecurity and anxiety.

If you find you continue to feel low, or are finding it difficult to cope, please contact your CNS who will advise you or refer you for further support.

Any diagnosis of cancer can also make you think what is important in your life and you may make positive changes as a result.

If you feel you are not coping with your emotions or you need extra support, you can contact your GP or CNS. Please find below some contacts for support.

Counselling

Macmillan Cancer support: 0808 808 00 00: 8am-8pm

Mind in mid Herts: Tel: 03001233393 Email: info@mind.org.uk / mindinfoteam@mind.org.uk / Website: www.mind.org.uk .

Counselling for residents of St. Albans, Welwyn Garden City, Hatfield and Stevenage

The Counselling Foundation: Tel: 01727 856693
Email: stalbens@counsellingfoundation.org

Melanoma support organisations

Changing Faces offers support and information to people who have a disfigurement, their family and friends. It has skin camouflage specialists.

Tel: 0300 012 0275 / Monday to Friday 10am-4 pm

Website: <https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/services-support/skin-camouflage-service/what-is-skin-camouflage/>

Melanoma UK: offers a range of information and support to anyone with melanoma.
Tel: 0808 171 2455 Email: info@melanomauk.org.uk

The British Association of Dermatologists (BAD): 0207 383266
www.bad.org.uk or Email: admin@bad.org.uk

Healthy living and lifestyle support:

There are many different things you can do to have a healthy lifestyle. These include:

- Eating a balanced diet
- Following sensible drinking guidelines
- Managing weight loss or gain
- Keeping active
- Looking after your mental health and finding ways to relax and manage stress
- Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
- Having meals based on starchy foods that give you energy, like brown rice, wholemeal bread, potatoes or pasta
- Including protein in your diet, such as meat, fish, eggs, beans or lentils. Protein helps the cells in your body grow and repair.

- Having some dairy foods like milk or yoghurt, or dairy alternatives like soya drinks
- Eating small amounts of unsaturated fat, such as vegetable oils and spreads, nuts, seeds and oily fish.
- Eating less saturated fat, which is found in fatty cuts of meat, fried food, cakes, chocolate and biscuits.
- Drinking plenty of fluids (at least six to eight glasses a day). Choose drinks that are low in sugar and caffeine.
- Trying not to drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week. Try to have a few alcohol-free days every week.
- If you have gained weight during cancer treatment, your doctor, nurse or dietitian can help you set a target for weight loss. Start the day with a healthy breakfast, choose healthy snacks like fruit or nuts and reduce your portion sizes gradually.
- To help you lose weight, use a smaller plate, eat slowly and avoid second helpings.
- Try to keep physically active during cancer treatment. This can help you keep to a healthy weight. It can also improve your strength, mood and heart and bone health.
- Choose activities that you enjoy, but avoid doing too much, too soon. If treatment is making you tired, you could do some light housework gardening, or go for a walk.
- Make time to relax every day. You could listen to soothing music or try meditation exercises.
- It is important to find ways to cope with stress. You could talk about your worries with family or friends, call the Macmillan Support Line or join Macmillan's online community.
- Smoking: If you smoke giving up is the healthiest decision you can make. Smoking can be a difficult habit to break but is support available.

Healthy living contacts

- **Hertfordshire Healthwalks:** Free regular walks near you.
healthwalks.cms@hertfordshire.gov.uk
- **Active Herts:** Local project to help inactive people aged 50 and over with support from professional support with specialists. www.activeherts.org.uk
- **Cycle Hub, Watford. Chaffinch Lane:** Advice and information about cycling and bikes including local cycle routes and maps.
Tel: 01923 223994 or www.watfordcyclehub.org.uk
- **Macmillan** have details on how to be more active and healthy eating advice such as "Move more" pack/ physical Activity information/Healthy eating and Cancer.
Tel: 0808 808000 or www.macmillan.org.uk
- **The British Wheel of Yoga:** 01529 306851 / www.bwy.org.uk
Email: office@bwy.org.uk
- **Wheelpower:** Dedicated to providing opportunities for disabled people or disabled people to live healthy lives:
Tel: 01296 395995 Email: info@wheelpower.org.uk

- **NHS Live Well:** On-line support with links to healthy eating and exercise:
www.nhs.uk/livewell

Frozen/prepacked meal home delivery service

Catering for special diets -

Wiltshire farm foods: Tel: 0800 0773100 www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com

Parsley Box: 0800 6127225

Other useful information

Travel insurance

When traveling abroad it is advised that you take out travel insurance and it is important to be honest about your diagnosis and recent surgery with your insurance company. You may find that the insurance is increased due to your condition.

Financial advice

Often financial concerns can cause stress especially if your surgery or treatment has impacted on your work and income. Macmillan website has a leaflet called "Money worries" which you may find useful.

Alternatively, you can also ring the Macmillan benefits advisors or Citizen Advice Bureau (details below):

Macmillan benefits advice: 0808 808 0000 or contact the Hertfordshire Macmillan benefits Advice service on 01438 843456

Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB): www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Practical help

Herts Help offers support by phone, face-to-face and practical advice and help.

8am to 6pm Tel: 0300 123 4044

Email: info@hertshelp.net / www.hertshelp.net

Contact details

Christine Palmer and Karen O'Connell

Skin cancer clinical nurse specialists: Tel: 01923217209

Monday-Friday or email: westherts.skincancercns@nhs.net

For a translation of this leaflet or of accessing this information in another format please contact PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on: Telephone: 01923 217198 or email: westherts.pals@nhs.net

Useful Telephone Numbers and Websites

Dermatology secretary at Watford Hospital	01923 217375
Dermatology secretary at Hemel Hempstead	01442 287467
Dermatology secretary, St Albans Hospital	01727 897837

Macmillan Information Centre, Watford Hospital	01923 436327
Grove House, St Albans (Cancer support centre)	01727 731013
Lynda Jackson Centre, Mount Vernon Cancer Centre (Cancer support centre)	020 3826 2555

For more information

www.bad.org.uk/public	British Association of Dermatology
www.dermnetnz.org	New Zealand Dermatology
www.ljmc.org	Linda Jackson Macmillan Centre
www.macmillan.org.uk	Macmillan
www.cancerresearchuk.org	Cancer Research
www.melanomafocus.org	Melanoma charity - useful information and videos for patients

West Hertfordshire Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust

This information has been compiled to give you an overview of the skin cancer service at West Herts. If you have any questions regarding your treatment, please discuss them at your appointments or if you prefer, please call your key worker.

PALS

If you need this leaflet in another **language, large print, Braille or audio version**, please call **01923 217198** or email westherts.pals@nhs.net.



Language



Large Print



Braille



Audio

Concerns, complaints or suggestions

If you are unhappy with your experience or would like to give feedback, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). PALS is available to patients, relatives, carers and friends to raise concerns.

For more information, please scan the QR code or visit our [website](#).

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