

Living with melanoma during the festive season



For people living with melanoma and their loved ones, the holiday period can bring up mixed experiences and feelings. In this fact sheet we will provide some tips which we hope will help make the most of this time.

Living with melanoma can be challenging at any time of the year. However, while the end-of-year holiday period is a time that many people look forward to throughout the year, for people affected by melanoma, the holiday period can bring up mixed experiences and feelings. These can range from not being able to engage in physical activities as much as desired due to melanoma treatment, to not feeling like there is much to celebrate as the holidays may bring up some painful emotions – especially in relation to fears about melanoma and the future. For some people, the holiday period can become a reminder about how life has changed following melanoma – for both people living with melanoma and their loved ones.

While these mixed feelings are expected and commonly experienced by people living with melanoma, the following tips may be helpful in making the most of this holiday period.

Tips to look after yourself as a patient:

- **Be intentional.** You may find that you are not able to do as much as you usually do. Be intentional about what matters most to you and brings you joy. Prioritise these activities and allow yourself to delegate or opt out of the things that are not as important. This will give you more time, space and energy to do what truly matters to you.
- **Savour.** This does not only relate to the delicious food and drinks of the festive season, but also the moments that are important to you. Sometimes, even while doing what matters, our minds may wander to thoughts about melanoma, upcoming scans, or everyday tasks like shopping or dinner plans. All these thoughts take us away from meaningful experiences. Instead focus your mind on the present and connect with your senses – notice the intricate details of what is happening around you (e.g., the twinkle in a child's eye, the tone of a giggle). When you notice that your mind has wandered, gently redirect it to the important thing that you are currently doing.

- **Allow yourself to feel.** There is a common expectation that the festive period is merry, filled with joy and happiness. However, it is okay if you are having a more reflective time, or experiencing some painful emotions, such as loss, grief or anxiety. Allow yourself to feel whatever comes up and consider talking to people you trust about how you are feeling. A problem shared is often a problem halved!

- **Plan to rest.** It may be helpful to schedule the times to rest (if you need it) as the festive period can get busy and sometimes overwhelming, especially if you are experiencing fatigue following treatment.

- **Be prepared.** Talk to your treatment team about the appointment and treatment schedule over the festive period and the support options available.

- **Ask for help.** Give yourself permission to do less than usual and ask for help when needed.

- **Connect with others.** The festive season is a time for connection, but it can feel isolating for those without a supportive circle. Consider connecting with others through a support group or online forums.

If your friend or family member has been diagnosed with melanoma, the following tips may also be helpful.

- Encourage your loved one to participate in festive celebrations to the extent they are able.

- Acknowledge that they may not be able to do as much as usual.

- Help create different festive traditions if your loved one is not able to engage in the usual activities.

- Offer help – both practical and emotional.



Remember to also look after yourself as a carer!

- Acknowledge that this time may be hard for you too, and that you may experience mixed emotions. Allow yourself to feel whatever comes up and be open about your experiences. You may find that you and your loved one are sharing many similar emotions.

- Think about what are the important things that you need to have during this festive season and be proactive about scheduling them in.

- Allow yourself to do things that are important even though your loved one may not be able to.

- Focus on getting the basics right (routine, sleep, diet, exercise) which will give you energy and vitality to look after yourself and your loved one.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Whether you are living with melanoma or supporting someone who has the disease, if you feel you need additional support, speak to someone.

- Melanoma Patients Australia: **1300 884 450**
- Cancer Council: **13 11 20**
- Lifeline: **13 11 14**
- MensLine Australia: **1300 78 99 78**
- BeyondBlue: **1300 22 4636** or chat online at beyondblue.org.au/get-support
- Carer Gateway Counselling Service: **1800 422 737**

You may also like to speak to your GP or oncologist about options for psychological support.