

# Caring for a loved one with melanoma

Family and friends play a critical 'carer' role throughout the melanoma journey.



In this fact sheet we cover common carer experiences, tips for managing carer stress and available resources.

## When your loved one is diagnosed with melanoma

Family and friends play a critical role from the time of melanoma diagnosis through treatment and into survivorship. Many people take on additional responsibilities such as accompanying the person with melanoma to medical appointments, co-ordinating or providing childcare, keeping friends and family updated, navigating the health care system, and providing emotional and social support.

Taking on a carer role can be a rewarding experience. Providing support for someone during a time of need can bring a sense of satisfaction, achievement and personal growth. It can promote intimacy and closeness in your relationship and create lasting memories.

Caring for someone can also be challenging and changes the roles already established within your relationship.

## Carer experiences

Although everybody is different, it is common for carers to feel angry, scared, sad, helpless, overwhelmed and guilty at times.

It is also common for carers to grieve changes in the relationship and loss of activities that used to be done together. For some, there may be anger and frustration that plans have been disrupted, the nature of the relationship has shifted and there are additional responsibilities to manage.

Guilt is one of the most common emotions experienced by carers. Carers might feel guilty for being well and helpless that they cannot 'fix' the situation. They might feel guilty for wanting a break from their carer role, or resentment for being in that position. They also may feel guilty that they have needs or are experiencing painful emotions when they are not the ones diagnosed with melanoma.

It can be common to feel lonely and isolated. Carers might feel as though nobody else understands what they are going through. Many carers feel a responsibility to prioritise the person with melanoma above their own needs and can start to feel invisible or as though are losing their own identity outside the carer role.

## Impact on sexual relationships

Melanoma and its treatments can impact a person's interest in sex. The emotional strain of caring for someone with melanoma might also leave carers feeling less interested in sex. It can be hard to switch from the roles of carer and patient back to being sexual partners.

## Tips for managing carer stress:

If you are finding caring for your loved one tough, remember you are not alone. What you are feeling is likely to be common among friends and family of someone with melanoma. These simple tips might help you to look after yourself:

- **Keep active.** Regular exercise has many health benefits and can help with feelings of anger, stress, anxiety, and depression. Even a quick walk around the block can help.
- **Take time for yourself.** Do something relaxing or enjoyable each day.
- **Talk to someone.** A trusted friend, GP or medical team. You may like to reach out to someone at Carer Gateway Counselling Service, a free Government program that provides services and support for carers ([counselling.carergateway.gov.au](https://counselling.carergateway.gov.au)).
- **Keep a journal.** Writing down what you are thinking and feeling can help to release worry and frustration. It might also help you to notice areas you might like additional support.
- **Be kind to yourself.** No one is a 'perfect carer'. Give yourself permission to do things outside of your caring role, whether it is pursuing a hobby or independently engaging in activities previously enjoyed with the person with melanoma.
- **Focus on the value of caring.** Acknowledging the benefits of caring may help you to feel better.
- **Lighten the load.** Use an app like Gather My Crew to conveniently organise transport, meals, help with the kids, grocery shopping or social visits among your social networks.



- **Get the basics right.** Try getting enough sleep, nourish your body with a balanced diet and limit your alcohol intake.

- **Join a support group.** Online and face-to-face support groups are available for carers. Reach out to Melanoma Patients Australia ([melanomapatients.org.au](https://melanomapatients.org.au)) or the Cancer Council Online Community ([cancer.org.au](https://cancer.org.au)) to find out more.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Cancer Council's 'Caring for someone with cancer' booklet: [cancer.org.au/caring-for-someone-with-cancer](https://cancer.org.au/caring-for-someone-with-cancer)
- Cancer Council Victoria's 'Caring for someone with cancer: Common emotions of carers' website: [cancervic.org.au/get-support/caring-for-someone-with-cancer/common-emotions-of-carers](https://cancervic.org.au/get-support/caring-for-someone-with-cancer/common-emotions-of-carers)
- Cancer Council's podcasts 'Cancer Affects the Carer Too' and 'Caring for someone with Advanced Cancer': [cancerCouncil.com.au/podcasts](https://cancerCouncil.com.au/podcasts)
- App: Gather My Crew: [gathermycrew.org.au](https://gathermycrew.org.au)
- Carer Gateway Counselling Service: [counselling.carergateway.gov.au](https://counselling.carergateway.gov.au)

## Phone numbers

- Carer Gateway Counselling Service: **1800 422 737**
- Melanoma Patients Australia: **1300 884 450**
- Cancer Council: **13 11 20**
- Lifeline: **13 11 14**