

Information for women on shared follow-up and survivorship care for early breast cancer

This information is for women who have been treated for early breast cancer* or ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) and their carers. It provides information about shared follow-up and survivorship care, including the benefits of shared care and who is involved.

Why is follow-up and survivorship care important?

After treatment for breast cancer, it is important to have follow-up visits to check whether breast cancer or DCIS has come back, to discuss your physical and emotional health, and to monitor and manage any risk factors and side effects of treatment. These follow-up visits will be with your specialist or GP, with support from nurses and other health professionals.

What is survivorship care?

Survivorship care focuses on your overall health and wellbeing, both when you are living with and beyond cancer. This includes supporting healthy lifestyle choices to reduce your risk of developing new cancers or the cancer coming back.

How can I access shared care?

If you were diagnosed with early breast cancer or DCIS and completed active treatment† three or more months ago, then you may be able to have shared follow-up and survivorship care.

The decision to participate in shared care is a joint one made by you, your specialist and your GP. Speak to your specialist about the next steps.

What is shared follow-up and survivorship care and who is involved?

Shared care is when your follow-up and survivorship care is jointly shared between your lead breast cancer specialist and your GP. Your "lead specialist" is decided by your specialist team and may be your surgeon, medical oncologist, or radiation oncologist, depending on the type of treatment you had, and your follow-up care needs.

The table on the next page provides an overview of how responsibilities are shared between you, your specialist and your GP.

You may see allied health professionals, such as dietitians, lymphoedema practitioners and psychologists. However, your lead specialist, GP, and nurses will coordinate your follow-up and survivorship care.

What is a Shared Care Plan?

The Shared Care Plan is a document with information about the shared care arrangement. It includes:

- ▶ contact information for you, your specialist and your GP
- ▶ a summary of your medical history, including your diagnosis and treatment
- ▶ the appointment schedule (who you will see for each follow-up visit and when), and
- ▶ a checklist of what should be done during appointments.

* Early breast cancer is defined as tumours of not more than five centimetres diameter, with either impalpable or palpable but not fixed lymph nodes and with no evidence of distant metastases¹

† Active treatment includes surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, and targeted therapies such as Herceptin®. You may still be receiving treatment with hormonal therapies, including tamoxifen and aromatase inhibitors.

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What are the benefits of shared care?

- ▶ Studies show that follow-up care by a GP is a safe and effective alternative to follow-up by a specialist and provides better continuity of care (more consistent care over time).
- ▶ A shared care approach may be more convenient, as you may have easier access to your GP than to your specialist.
- ▶ You may benefit from your GP overseeing all of your health issues.

If needed, your GP can arrange rapid access to the specialist at any time.

What if I notice a symptom between visits?

If you notice a change or any new concerning symptoms between follow-up visits, do not wait until your next scheduled follow-up appointment. See your GP as soon as possible so that the cause of the symptom can be explored.

How responsibilities are shared

It is important for you, your specialist, and your GP to take active roles in shared follow-up and survivorship care, with support from other health professionals including nurses. Understanding everyone's responsibilities when the Shared Care Plan is developed is important for your follow-up care.

SPECIALIST	GP	YOUR ROLE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assesses if you are suitable for shared follow-up and survivorship care - Develops the Shared Care Plan - Communicates with your GP to provide a summary of your diagnosis and treatment - Records your follow-up results and sends updates to your GP - Sees you as soon as possible (rapid referral) if required by your GP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agrees to your Shared Care Plan, including the follow-up appointment schedule - Provides care, including managing side effects of treatment for breast cancer and any effects from endocrine (hormonal) therapy - Records your follow-up care results and sends updates to your specialist - Refers you to your specialist if required (rapid referral) - Manages a range of other health issues - Supports you to make healthy lifestyle and wellbeing choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand and agree to follow-up and survivorship care being shared between your GP and lead specialist - Attend appointments as outlined in your Shared Care Plan - Bring your Shared Care Plan to GP or specialist visits - Get a referral for your annual mammogram - Talk openly about your concerns and needs - Actively manage your health, including taking steps to maintain a healthy lifestyle

Speak to your specialist or nurse for more information about shared follow-up and survivorship care for early breast cancer and the next steps

When are follow-up appointments?

After treatment for early breast cancer or DCIS, the recommended timing for follow-up visits is:¹

	Years 1 and 2	Years 3 - 5	After 5 years
History and physical examination	Every 3-6 months	Every 6-12 months	Every 12 months
Mammogram	Every 12 months (first mammogram 12 months after diagnosis)		

Your follow-up schedule will be based on the recommended timing and is tailored to your individual situation.

Shared care does not affect the timing of your follow-up visits or the tests you have. This will be the same as if your follow-up care was managed by your specialist alone.

Your Shared Care Plan outlines which visits will be with your GP and which will be with your specialist. Speak to your specialist or GP about booking these appointments. You should attend these appointments as scheduled.

1. Cancer Australia. Guidance for the management of early breast cancer. Recommendations and practice points. Cancer Australia, Surry Hills, NSW, 2020.

