

Shared follow-up care

Have you been treated for early breast cancer or ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS)?

Would you like to have your follow-up care shared between your specialist and GP?

Why is follow-up important?

After treatment, it is important to have follow-up visits to check whether breast cancer or DCIS has come back, to monitor side effects of treatment and to provide practical and emotional support.

What is shared care?

Shared care is when your follow-up care is shared between your specialist and your GP.

Shared care is not a new approach in healthcare. It is already used in the areas of diabetes and obstetrics.

A recent project by Cancer Australia demonstrated shared care to be an effective model of care for the follow-up of women with early breast cancer.

What are the benefits of shared care?

- ▶ Studies of shared care for breast cancer show that follow-up by a GP is a safe and effective alternative to follow-up by a specialist and provides better continuity of care.
- ▶ A shared care approach may be more convenient as you may have easier access to your GP than to a specialist.
- ▶ You may benefit from the fact that your GP oversees all of your health issues rather than just one aspect of your care.

How can I access shared care?

Have you been diagnosed with early breast cancer or DCIS?

Have you completed active treatment* three or more months ago?

If you answered 'yes' to these questions, then you may be suitable to have your follow-up care shared between your specialist and GP.

Speak to your specialist about the next steps.

What is a shared care plan?

Your specialist and GP will work with you to develop a Shared Care Plan. This will contain information about your diagnosis, treatment and follow-up and will help your GP and specialist to manage your care. The plan will also be useful if you change doctors in the future or consult other doctors or allied health professionals.

*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.



Where will I go for my follow-up visits?

In shared care, some or all of your follow-up visits will be with your GP rather than with your specialist. Your GP will be supported by and will communicate with your specialist about your care. Your GP will have rapid access to consult with your specialist or to arrange a consultation for you if required.

What will happen during my follow-up visits?

Follow-up provides an opportunity to discuss your physical and emotional health, and involves monitoring for any side effects of treatment, regular physical examinations and breast imaging tests (mammogram, and ultrasound if required). Such visits also allow your doctor to monitor your breast cancer risk factors, including your family history and lifestyle factors.

When would these follow-up visits be?

The frequency of your follow-up visits and the tests you have will be the same as if your follow-up care was being managed by your specialist alone. Your follow-up schedule will be based on your individual situation.

For example, following treatment for early breast cancer, the recommended timing for follow-up visits (history and physical examination) is:

- ▶ years 1–2 after treatment: every 3–6 months
- ▶ years 3–5 after treatment: every 6–12 months
- ▶ more than 5 years after treatment: every year.

In general, it is also recommended that you have a mammogram once a year, with the first mammogram one year after your diagnosis.

You will be provided with a schedule for follow-up care which will outline which visits will be with your GP.

Speak to your specialist or GP about how to make these appointments.

What do I do if I notice a symptom between visits?

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

Participating in shared follow-up care

Cancer Australia is evaluating shared follow-up care at your health service. The information gained will build the evidence for the delivery of best practice follow-up care.

Information will be collected about the process of shared follow-up care but this will not identify you by name. Your personal information will only be shared between members of your healthcare team.

How will my experiences of shared care be used?

Overall findings regarding shared follow-up care will be published. This will include making information available on the website www.canceraustralia.gov.au Please be assured that any published information will not identify you.