

MY MELANOMA JOURNEY - Jay Allen

Life was going good you could say I was a truck driver working long hours, had a beautiful family and had just finished renovating our house.

I had this mole on my ankle that was there my whole life, but half way through 2007 it began to get itchy, scab up every now and then and would bleed. I thought nothing of it, I wore work boots to work and just thought it was them rubbing against it. After much persistence from my wife in January 2008 I finally went to the doctor and had it checked, the doctor took one look at it and said that's got to come out.

A few days later, I received news that the mole was a melanoma 1.95mm deep. Our thoughts were, ok it is not good news but we will be right, get it cut out and get on with it. I had no idea what I was in for or just how serious melanoma is.

Fast-forward a couple of months and the melanoma that was on my ankle had turned into a life threatening situation. I had two major operations, a bout of chemotherapy and now have to have check ups every 3 months, which include chest X-rays and blood tests for 5 years. The melanoma had spread to one lymph node in my groin. I was diagnosed with stage 3 melanoma. I had no idea that a mole on your body can turn into something so deadly.

A melanoma only needs to get 1 mm deep and can get into your blood stream or lymphatic system and spread to other parts of your body. Melanoma is the most serious form of skin cancer. Alarmingly, Australia has the highest incidence of melanoma in the world and it is often referred to as "Australia's cancer" Melanoma is the third most common form of cancer in Australian men and women and is the most common of all cancers in individuals aged 15-39. Each year in Australia melanoma is responsible for 1200 deaths and 10,000 new cases are diagnosed annually.

Before my diagnosis I was a frequent indoor tanning user, my surgeon is adamant that this contributed to my disease so I have been advocating since December 2008 to increase public knowledge of the inherent risks associated with sun-bed use. I also would like people to be more sun -smart and get regular skin check ups. Early detection is the key, melanoma is almost 90% curable if caught early.

I have just reached a major milestone in my cancer journey, 3 years cancer free. My diagnosis has been life changing I no longer drive trucks, am now working for Melanoma Institute Australia as the Community Coordinator, and facilitate melanoma support groups through out NSW.

Melanoma Institute Australia aims to be a global leader in the research, treatment and prevention of melanoma. The Institute is dedicated to minimizing the devastating impact of melanoma on the community and working to ultimately find a cure for melanoma.

If there was one message I can give it would be to check your skin regularly, particularly any moles that increase in size, change in colour, change in shape/irregular border, itch or bleeding and anything on your skin that does not look right. If you have any of these warning signs, get your skin checked by your doctor. Melanoma is not always just a bit of skin cancer that gets cut out, it can be quite invasive and can kill you. It happened to me and it can happen to you too.

www.melanoma.org.au

www.sunbedban.jigsy.com

Melanoma is deadly serious.