

Fatigue

Myeloma Nurse Guide

The Myeloma Nurse Guide Series has been developed to enhance nurse knowledge, inform practice and support nurses in the delivery of high quality treatment and care to myeloma patients and families. The information has been reviewed by myeloma nurse and medical experts and should be used in conjunction with local and national policies, protocols and guidelines.

What is cancer-related fatigue?

Cancer-related fatigue is tiredness or exhaustion which interferes with normal daily activities and is not alleviated by rest or sleep. It is often under-reported by patients which can, in turn, lead to an underestimation of its impact on quality of life.

Around 90% of myeloma patients will experience fatigue during their disease course, particularly when on treatment. Fatigue is also commonly experienced during recovery from stem cell transplantation. In myeloma patients, fatigue is usually multi-factorial, and due to a combination of disease, treatment and psychological effects, as described below.

Disease-related factors

- Active disease
- Complications of myeloma: anaemia, pain, infection, hypercalcaemia
- Other comorbidities
- Nutritional deficiencies

Treatment-related factors

- Side effects of treatments
- Medications e.g. analgesics
- Sleep disturbance
- Fluid/electrolyte imbalance

Psychological factors

- Emotional distress
- Anxiety
- Low mood, depression

Clinical features

Symptoms include:

- Lethargy
- Reduced activity
- Shortness of breath after light activity
- Poor concentration and difficulty making decisions
- Irritability, impatience and irrational behaviour
- Tearfulness
- Low mood or depression

It is common for symptoms to fluctuate in severity and duration, particularly during a course or cycle of treatment.

Assessment and monitoring

Assessment features	Rationale
<p>Regular assessment and grading, using an appropriate tool</p> <p>Find out more about their fatigue by asking about: sleep and rest patterns, how daily activities are managed, what makes symptoms better or worse, and how they rate their fatigue on a scale of 1–10.</p>	<p>To recognise, measure, manage and monitor fatigue. An assessment tool can aid communication and provide a framework for discussion.</p> <p>To guide management of treatment-related fatigue</p>
<p>Blood tests: FBC, thyroid function, renal function, calcium, iron, vitamin B12, folate, CRP</p> <p>Check medication history and side effects</p>	<p>To check for causes of fatigue and treat accordingly</p>
<p>Ask about mood, assess for anxiety or depression</p>	<p>To identify any psychological changes and provide support interventions</p>

Fatigue assessment and grading tools are shown in the Appendix.

Prevention and treatment

Nurses can support patients by taking a proactive approach and assist patients to modify their activities and routines to minimise the impact of fatigue on quality of life.

Specific treatments for fatigue are related to any contributing factors and include:

- Reviewing side effects of myeloma treatment, modifying doses if necessary
- Treating anaemia with blood transfusions or erythropoietin
- Treating infections
- Correcting dehydration and electrolyte imbalance
- Boosting nutrition
- Reviewing pain management
- Supporting and treating feelings of anxiety or depression. In severe cases of fatigue, psychostimulant drugs may be considered.

Nursing management points

Monitoring

- Be vigilant for signs of fatigue and alert the medical team promptly about any new or worsening symptoms
- Encourage patients to speak up about their symptoms and the importance and validity of fatigue as a symptom to report to their doctor or nurse

Management

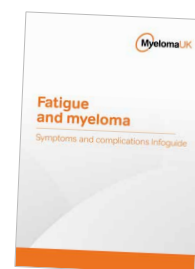
- Give patients the chance to discuss their symptoms and the impact fatigue has on their quality of life and change in activity levels
- Encourage good hydration and a well-balanced diet
- Coordinate any referrals such as complementary therapy, dietician, physiotherapy and psychological support
- Help carers and families understand fatigue and how they can best support the patient

Self-care strategies for patients

- Use a diary to help identify what increases or reduces symptoms
- Plan activity to coincide with periods of greater energy levels. Seek help and delegate tasks to others where possible
- Take regular exercise and continue with social activities where possible, to help boost mood and feelings of normality
- Take short periods of rest during the day but avoid prolonged periods of sleep, which can make symptoms worse and interfere with sleep routines
- Try to improve sleep by establishing a routine, avoiding stimulants and screens before bed, taking painkillers if required
- Talk to family and friends about symptoms so they are aware of any limitations to lifestyle, so they can provide understanding and support

Patient information key points

- Provide written information to help patients and families understand fatigue and how it can be managed
- Ensure patients understand the importance of early reporting of symptoms and side effects
- Suggest using a patient diary to monitor symptoms and plan activities



References



A list of key references is available on Myeloma Academy:
academy.myeloma.org.uk/myeloma-nurse-guide-references

Appendix

Fatigue Assessment Tools

- **Myeloma Patient Outcome Scale (MyPOS)**
academy.myeloma.org.uk/resources/mypos
- **European Organisation for Research and Treatment of Cancer (EORTC) QLQ C3**
academy.myeloma.org.uk/resources/qlq-c30
- **Brief Fatigue Inventory (BFI)**
academy.myeloma.org.uk/resources/brief-fatigue-inventory/
- **Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy-Fatigue (FACIT-F)**
www.facit.org/_files/ugd/626819_d1beda1cf9b14857879e082ac7682220.pdf

Common Toxicity Grading Criteria for fatigue

Adverse event	Grade 1 (mild)	Grade 2 (moderate)	Grade 3 (severe)
Fatigue	Fatigue relieved by rest	Fatigue not relieved by rest; limiting instrumental ADL	Fatigue not relieved by rest, limiting self-care ADL

ADL – activities of daily living



Myeloma★Academy

For further nurse guides and other educational resources on myeloma and related conditions:

academy.myeloma.org.uk

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