MMRF PATIENT WELLNESS GUIDE

Coping with Multiple Myeloma: Managing Stress & Anxiety

MOST PEOPLE EXPERIENCE STRESS OR ANXIETY at different points in life, but living with myeloma can make these feelings more frequent and harder to manage. Learning healthy ways to cope can help improve your overall quality of life.

What's the difference between stress and anxiety?

Both stress and anxiety are normal emotional responses to a myeloma diagnosis and the treatment journey. Knowing the difference can help you get the support you need.

Stress

- A short-term, temporary feeling of overwhelm
- Usually brought on by something specific, like dealing with insurance
- Usually lessens once the situation is resolved

Anxiety

- A feeling of worry, fear, or unease that doesn't go away
- May not have a clear cause
- If it becomes overwhelming, affects daily life, or lasts a long time, it may be a medical condition that needs treatment

How stress and anxiety relate to myeloma

Navigating insurance, managing appointments, waiting for test results, or making care decisions are all common parts of myeloma treatment — and all can cause stress.

Living with myeloma can bring understandable worries about treatment and the future. These concerns, along with side effects from some treatments (like steroids), can increase emotional distress and anxiety.

Some patients in remission may feel anxious about the possibility of myeloma returning and may want to continue treatment without discussing with their treatment team whether it's still necessary. It's important to remember that cancer treatments don't address anxiety itself — emotional support, coping strategies, and open conversations with your care team play a vital role.

Managing stress and anxiety can improve survival rates

People who get help managing their stress and anxiety often see improvements in their overall medical condition. They are also more likely to follow through with their treatment plan and have a better quality of life.

Stress and anxiety can cause physical, emotional, and cognitive symptoms	
Physical Symptoms	▪ Fatigue ▪ Muscle pain ▪ Digestive problems ▪ Sleep problems ▪ Fast heart rate ▪ Dizziness ▪ Sweating or shaking
Emotional Symptoms	▪ Irritation ▪ Sadness ▪ Depression ▪ Fear ▪ Panic
Cognitive Symptoms	▪ Difficulty concentrating ▪ Poor memory ▪ Trouble making decisions

Active ways to cope with stress/anxiety

- Create a support network of people you trust
- Stay physically active with gentle exercises like walking, swimming, yoga, and tai chi
- Add self-care practices to your treatment, such as meditation, acupuncture, massage, gardening, and/or spending time outside. Choose activities that work for your energy level and physical ability
- Join a myeloma support group or find a Myeloma Mentor

MMRF Support Groups

MMRF Myeloma Mentor

Tips for communicating with your care team and loved ones

The first step in managing stress and anxiety is to talk about how you feel. This can be uncomfortable, but your loved ones and treatment team can support and guide you so that you get the help you need.

- Get to know your treatment team. They can share educational resources and help you with questions about symptoms, treatments, or appointments
- Ask to speak with a nurse or social worker at your clinic who can provide tools for emotional support
- Take notes, write down your concerns, and track any changes in your thoughts, feelings, or symptoms

Learn strategies for maintaining open, honest communication to help you and your care team decide on the best treatment plan for you.

Help is available

There are many ways to cope with stress and anxiety, but you don't have to do it alone. If you are struggling, support is available.

- Talk therapy can help you manage stress and anxiety
- Some people benefit from anti-anxiety medication

Talk with your doctor about options that may help.

Have more questions about how to manage stress and anxiety?

The MMRF Patient Navigation Center is available to answer your questions and provide additional support. Give us a call at 1-888-841-6673, Monday-Friday, 9AM-7PM ET, or visit us online at themmrf.org/support/patient-navigation-center/