

Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia

What is Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia?

Waldenstrom's is a cancer in which your plasma cells become abnormal and grow out of control. Plasma cells are a type of white blood cell. They help protect the body from infection and disease by making special proteins called antibodies. Antibodies attach themselves to foreign substances to fight infection or disease. In Waldenstrom's, too many plasma cells are made in the bone marrow which results in the antibodies being made in an abnormal way.

These problems may occur:

- Your blood may become thicker than normal. This makes it hard for the blood to flow in the small blood vessels of the brain, eyes, and kidneys.
- The abnormal plasma cells crowd out the healthy cells in the bone marrow. This causes a decrease in the number of red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets.
 - › Fewer red blood cells causes anemia.
 - › The decrease in white blood cells increases your risk of infection.
 - › Fewer platelets increases your risk of bleeding and bruising.

Symptoms

At first, you may not have any signs of your disease. Symptoms usually begin gradually.

Early signs are:

- Dizziness/Shortness of breath
- Sleepiness
- Less energy
- Weakness

Later signs can include:

- Weight loss
- Blurred vision
- Headaches
- Bleeding from the nose or gums

How is Waldenstrom's diagnosed?

Your doctor will examine your blood and bone marrow under a microscope. Please read the pamphlet Bone Marrow Test.

Treatment

Waldenstrom's is only treated when you have symptoms. In some cases, this may not be for a few years. Your doctor will carefully assess your medical history, general health, and the extent of your disease before recommending treatment. Treatment is very specific for each person.

Chemotherapy and/or immunotherapy may be treatment options for you. We have pamphlets that describe the medications and chemotherapy/immunotherapy in general. Your nurse will give you these pamphlets when your treatment starts.

During the first few months of treatment, the abnormal cells usually decrease in number at a rapid rate, and a remission may occur. A remission is usually temporary but during this time there is a return to good health. Your symptoms may disappear and abnormal cells may no longer be found in your bone marrow. To find out the amount of disease present, your doctor will order blood tests and do a bone marrow test..

Your doctor may recommend plasmapheresis. This will treat the symptoms related to the slowing of the blood in your vessels (due to how thick your blood is). Plasmapheresis removes the abnormal protein from the plasma in your blood. You will be connected to a machine with a needle placed in each of your arms. Blood flows out through one needle, through the machine to remove the abnormal antibodies, and then returns the other healthy components of your blood through the other needle.

Caring for yourself

Allow yourself and your family time to adjust to the diagnosis. Many people find it helpful to discuss their feelings, fears, or concerns with their family, a health professional, or someone who has gone through a similar experience. Your doctor and/or nurse are here to listen, answer your questions, and help you live with this disease.

Rest if you feel tired or short of breath. Allow yourself more time to do everyday tasks and have others help with housework and making meals. Even though you are tired, it is important that you exercise (such as taking a short walk everyday). Your nurse can give you information on managing fatigue.

Protect yourself from infection by avoiding people with cold or flu symptoms. Talk to your doctor about getting the flu vaccine every year for you and all household members. Your doctor may also suggest you receive a vaccine to prevent pneumonia.

When should I call my doctor?

Call your doctor if you have new symptoms or your symptoms increase.

Go to the nearest Emergency Department right away if you have:

- Severe nausea
- Excessive thirst
- Drowsiness
- Confusion
- A temperature over 38°C (100.4°F)
- Chills

Learn more

The Canadian Cancer Society, Cancer Information Service (CIS) toll-free number is 1 (888) 939-3333. Trained Cancer Information Specialists can discuss the latest treatment options for your disease and tell you about support services in your area. They can also give you good Internet sites where you can seek more information or send you written information. This service is available in French and English.

The Nova Scotia Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia Support Group meets 3-4 times a year in Halifax, offering education and support to its members.

Website <https://nswmsupport.wordpress.com/support/halifax-support-group/>

For more information contact Ron Ternoway at 1-866-768-8467 or rternoway@eastlink.ca.

The International Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia Foundation is a non-profit organization that supports patients with this disease as well as promoting research into this disease.

Website www.iwmf.com Telephone (941) 927-4963

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What are your questions? Please ask. We are here to help you.



Looking for more health information?

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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Nova Scotia Health Authority

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The information in this brochure is for informational and educational purposes only.

The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider. The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.