

Facts About Aplastic Anemia (AA)

Aplastic Anemia (AA) is a rare autoimmune blood disorder where the bone marrow fails to produce enough blood cells, including red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. This can lead to a serious condition where the counts of all three blood cell types are low. AA can cause significant health issues including infections, bleeding, and severe anemia.

- AA affects about 2 in every 1 million people in Europe and North America
- AA can occur at any age, but it is diagnosed more often in people between the ages of 10 and 20, and in those over the age of 40

An AA diagnosis can be challenging for you and your loved one, but access to timely regular medical care can help you maintain good health and even eventually return to regular activities. Support from family, friends, and dedicated groups can also help you navigate the emotional and psychological impact.

Some Signs and Symptoms of AA

- Fatigue
- Breathlessness
- Pale skin
- Frequent infections
- Mouth sores
- Easy bleeding or bruising
- Flat and small red spots under their skin (called *petechiae*) due to low platelet count

What Causes AA?

- AA can be caused by immune system issues, exposure to toxins (e.g., benzene, pesticides), certain medications, chemotherapy used in cancer treatment, ionizing radiation from radioactive substances, and some infections (like hepatitis or the Epstein-Barr virus)
- Although many causes have been identified that can trigger AA, usually the underlying cause is unknown, especially in children
- Hereditary forms of AA also exist, but they are less common

How is AA treated?

To understand the best treatment pathway for you, speak with your medical team. Treatment options for AA can include:

Supportive Care

- **Antibiotics** to manage infections
- **Blood transfusions** to boost blood counts
- **Iron chelation therapies** for controlling excess iron in the blood
- **Growth factors** to help increase the production of various blood cells

Targeted therapies

- **Immunosuppressive therapy** to modulate the body's immune system and prevent it from attacking the bone marrow stem cells so new cells can grow and blood counts improve
- **Stem cell transplantation** to replace the patient's bone marrow stem cells with healthy stem cells from a donor

Living with AA

Learning about and actively managing your disease, seeking support, and making the necessary care adjustments can help you maintain a fulfilling life with AA.

Knowledge:

- Engage with healthcare professionals and AA patient organizations to **understand the disease**, and **educate your social circle** to create a supportive environment

Self-Care:

- **Maintain a balanced nutritional diet** with controlled sodium intake and practice **mindfulness activities** like meditation, yoga, or tai chi for overall wellness

Social Support:

- **Seek support** from counselling, family and friends, or support groups to cope with the emotional and psychological impacts of AA

Healthy Lifestyle:

- Adjust daily routines to **manage fatigue and symptoms**, incorporating balanced rest, activity, nutrition planning, and energy-saving techniques to enhance quality of life

Regular Monitoring and Care:

- Remain vigilant for symptoms of a severe infection (sepsis) and promptly connect with your healthcare team if any emerge. Prepare for emergencies, including knowing the signs of serious complications
 - **IMPORTANT:** Sepsis is a life-threatening response to infection that can lead to dangers like tissue damage and organ failure
- Collaborate closely with your healthcare team to manage symptoms, adhere to treatment plans, and maintain detailed records for medical discussions, ensuring proactive care

For more detailed **information about MDS**, check out the [AAMAC Educational Series: Aplastic Anemia](#) resource

For more **information about support groups and peer-to-peer support programs in Canada for people living with AA**, please [contact](#) the **Aplastic Anemia & Myelodysplasia Association of Canada (AAMAC)** at info@aamac.ca or 1-888-840-0039, or visit www.aamac.ca.

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