

**Myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS)** are diseases of the **bone marrow**. In MDS, your bone marrow produces **immature, abnormal blood cells** that do not work properly.

Your bone marrow makes **three** main types of blood cells:



Red blood cells carry oxygen around the body



White blood cells fight infections



Platelets prevent bleeding

If you have MDS, you have **low levels** of one or more of these types of blood cells.

MDS is a type of **cancer**, but it is sometimes called **bone marrow failure**.

There are several types of MDS. Most people who get it are **over 50 years old**.

We do not know exactly **what causes MDS**. It is not because of anything you have done. MDS is not infectious.

Some patients with MDS are at risk of their MDS becoming **acute myeloid leukaemia (AML)**.

The main signs and symptoms of MDS are due to **low levels of red blood cells, white blood cells or platelets**. Some people have **no symptoms** and are diagnosed by chance from a routine blood test.



Fatigue



Shortness of breath



Easy bruising



Bleeding



Skin rashes



Infections

## What is the treatment for MDS?

Your treatment depends on your **type** of MDS, and how it **behaves**. This can vary from person to person even with the same type of MDS.



Not all people with MDS have symptoms that need active treatment. If you are not having treatment, you will have regular check-ups. This is known as **active monitoring** or **Watch and Wait**.

You might have **non-intensive treatment** to try and slow down the progression of MDS and improve your blood counts. This includes medicines such as **azacitidine** or **lenalidomide**.

You might have **intensive treatment**, which aims to kill as many MDS cells as possible. This may be **chemotherapy** or an **immunosuppressant** such as azathioprine. It may be followed by a **stem cell transplant** to replace your abnormal bone marrow cells with healthy ones from a matched donor.

You might have **supportive care** to control your symptoms of MDS. This aims to improve your quality of life, rather than treat your MDS. It includes blood transfusions, growth factors (medicines to boost your blood cell counts), antibiotics, antifungals or antivirals. You can benefit from supportive care at any time during your treatment.



## Living with MDS

A diagnosis of MDS can be a **shock**. You may need a lot of time and help from your haematology team to adjust to your situation and feelings. They may be able to refer you for counselling or psychotherapy if you need it.

**Physical symptoms** can affect you, whether you are having treatment or not. If these affect your day-to-day activities, you should seek help. **Many symptoms are responsive to treatment.**

Make sure you talk to your **healthcare professionals** regularly. They will be able to help you if you need any treatment for physical symptoms or treatment side effects.

For more information about MDS or AML, you can download a digital copy or order a hard copy of our free dedicated booklets.

Scan this QR code to take you to the MDS booklet:



Scan this QR code to take you to the AML booklet:



## Want to talk?

Call our freephone helpline on **08088 010 444**  
(free from landlines and all major mobile networks)

Message us on Whatsapp at **07500068065**

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