

Multiple Myeloma



What Is Multiple Myeloma?

Multiple myeloma is a cancer that begins in the bone marrow. Bone marrow is inside of bones where white and other blood cells grow.

Multiple myeloma is a cancer of plasma cells, which are a type of white blood cell. When plasma cells are healthy, they make antibodies that help fight infection. When plasma cells are unhealthy, they can become myeloma cells. These unhealthy myeloma cells can take over the healthy cells in bone marrow. When this happens, the cancer can damage your bones, ability to make blood, and cause other problems.

The disease usually occurs in adults older than 50. You may be more likely to get multiple myeloma if someone in your family has had it.



What Are the Warning Signs of Multiple Myeloma?

- Bone pain, especially in the back or ribs
- Broken bones
- Feeling very tired and weak
- Losing weight without trying
- Having more illnesses and fevers
- Feeling very thirsty
- Urinating frequently
- Feeling numbness and tingling in the hands and feet



How Is Multiple Myeloma Diagnosed?

- You doctor will ask you about your symptoms and do a physical exam. A blood test and urine test will also be ordered to check for signs of multiple myeloma.
- If you have signs of the disease, your doctor may order a bone marrow test. This test is usually done on the hip bone. A needle is used to remove a small amount of bone, fluid, and cells from the bone marrow.
- Other tests, such as x-rays and MRIs, can help your doctor check your bones for signs of multiple myeloma.



How Is Multiple Myeloma Treated?

You and your doctor will work together to decide the right treatment for you. Treatment depends on how much disease is in your body and whether you have symptoms. Treatment may focus on helping you feel better, slowing the progress of the disease, and prolonging life.

People who have no symptoms may not need treatment right away. Treatments for people who have symptoms include:

- Chemotherapy
- Steroid drugs
- Radiation

Some people with the disease may get stem cell transplantation. This procedure replaces the cancer cells in bone marrow with healthy cells.

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Questions For My Doctor

- How advanced is my cancer?
- What are my treatment choices and what is best for me?
- What are the side effects from the treatment?
- How long will it take before I recover from treatment?
- What happens if the treatment does not work?
- Am I a candidate for stem cell transplant?
- Can I keep doing the things I like to do?
- What should I tell my kids and family?
- How can I stay healthy for as long as possible?
- Should I be thinking about end-of-life planning?



Bottom Line

- Multiple myeloma is a cancer of plasma cells, which are a type of white blood cells that come from the bone marrow.
- In multiple myeloma, plasma cells turn into cancer cells that spread, causing damage to bone marrow, your bones, and other problems.
- Symptoms include bone pain, broken bones, fatigue, weakness, and weight loss.
- Your doctor can diagnose multiple myeloma with a blood test, bone marrow biopsy, and tests such as x-rays and MRIs.
- Treatment depends on how much disease is in your body and whether you have symptoms. Treatment may include chemotherapy, radiation, and steroid drugs. Some people may undergo stem cell transplantation.

For More Information

- **Medline Plus:** www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/multiplemyeloma.html
- **American Society of Clinical Oncology:** www.cancer.net/cancer-types/multiple-myeloma
- **Leukemia and Lymphoma Society:** www.lls.org/#/diseaseinformation/myeloma/
- **International Myeloma Foundation:** http://myeloma.org/pdfs/Patient_Handbook_2013.pdf

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