

What is Multiple Myeloma?

Multiple myeloma is a type of cancer that affects plasma cells, which are a kind of white blood cell found in your bone marrow. These cells normally help your body fight infections by making antibodies. In multiple myeloma, these cells grow out of control and crowd out healthy blood cells. This can lead to problems with your bones, immune system, kidneys, and red blood cell counts.

Risk Factors

- Age (most common in people over 60)
- Being male
- African American descent
- Family history of multiple myeloma
- History of other plasma cell diseases
- Exposure to radiation or certain chemicals

Symptoms

- Bone pain, especially in the back or ribs
- Feeling very tired or weak
- Frequent infections
- Unexplained weight loss
- Increased thirst or urination
- Nausea or constipation
- Weakness in the legs
- Easy bruising or bleeding

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Diagnosis

Doctors usually diagnose multiple myeloma with blood tests, urine tests, and bone marrow biopsies. Imaging tests like X-rays, MRIs, or CT scans may be used to look for bone damage. These tests help doctors see how many abnormal plasma cells are present and how the disease is affecting the body.

Treatment Options

- Medications: Chemotherapy, targeted therapy, and immunotherapy can help kill cancer cells or stop them from growing.
- Stem cell transplant: This replaces damaged bone marrow with healthy cells.
- Radiation therapy: May be used to treat bone pain or damage.
- Steroids: Help reduce inflammation and kill myeloma cells.
- Supportive care: Includes treatment for anemia, bone health, and infections.

What You Can Do on Your Own

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet
- Stay active as much as your energy allows
- Avoid infections by washing hands and staying away from sick people
- Drink plenty of water
- Follow your treatment plan closely
- Attend all medical appointments

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is multiple myeloma curable?

A: It is not usually curable, but treatment can help people live longer and feel better.

Q: How fast does it grow?

A: It can vary. Some people have slow-growing disease, while others have faster-growing types.

Q: Can I still live a normal life?

A: Many people with multiple myeloma continue doing everyday activities, especially with good care.

Q: What causes it?

A: The exact cause isn't known, but certain risk factors may increase your chances.

Q: Will I lose my hair from treatment?

A: Some treatments may cause hair loss, but not all of them do.

When to Seek Additional Help

- Sudden or severe bone pain
- Trouble breathing or chest pain
- Signs of infection (fever, chills)
- Severe fatigue or weakness
- Confusion or trouble thinking clearly
- Trouble passing urine

