

# Multiple Myeloma

## About multiple myeloma

Multiple myeloma is an incurable cancer of plasma cells, a type of white blood cell in the bone marrow that produces antibodies and helps fight infection. When plasma cells become cancerous and multiply, they are known as myeloma cells.<sup>1</sup> Normal bone marrow produces stem cells that develop into healthy blood cells, including red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets. When a buildup of myeloma cells occurs, it can overwhelm the production of healthy cells, causing damage to the bone as well as low blood counts. When myeloma cells collect in several sites, it is called multiple myeloma.<sup>1</sup> While it is a rare cancer, it is the second most common blood cancer.<sup>2</sup> It typically occurs in individuals 60 years of age or older, with few cases in individuals younger than 40.<sup>3</sup> After initial therapy, it is common for individuals with multiple myeloma to become less responsive to therapy or eventually experience a relapse, when the cancer returns. Some patients also become refractory, which means they stop responding to treatment and still have myeloma cells in their bone marrow.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 75,000 patients around the world are living with relapsed or refractory multiple myeloma.<sup>4</sup>

## Treating multiple myeloma

There is no one standard treatment for the disease and most treatment plans are based on a number of factors. With no curative therapies, treatment plans are based on: age/general health, results of laboratory/genomic tests, symptoms/disease complications and prior treatment.<sup>5</sup>

Therapeutic options for multiple myeloma include:<sup>1,6</sup>

- Chemotherapy
- Bone marrow transplant
- Radiotherapy
- Surgery

Among chemotherapy drugs, you can find:

- Cytotoxic
- Corticosteroids
- Immune-modulatory drugs
- Molecular targets

Throughout the multiple myeloma journey, a treatment team works with the patient to introduce different therapy combinations to address treatment resistance and/or disease progression.

## Questions to ask your doctor

When you are diagnosed with multiple myeloma or have had prior treatment for the disease, you may want to ask your doctor questions like these about your diagnosis and treatment plan:

- What are my treatment choices?
- What are the expected benefits of each kind of treatment?
- What are the risks of each treatment?
- What are the side effects of each treatment?
- How will I know if a treatment is working?
- How will each treatment affect my daily life?
- How will I know if my cancer is progressing?
- What are the symptoms of disease progression?
- If my disease stops responding to a course of treatment, what are my options?

## Additional resources

[Understanding The Maze of Relapsed and Refractory Multiple Myeloma \(PDF 0.5 MB\)](#)

[Multiple Myeloma By The Numbers \(PDF 0.2 MB\)](#)

[Multiple Myeloma Backgrounder \(PDF 0.2 MB\)](#)



1. American Cancer Society. Multiple Myeloma. Available at: [www.cancer.org/acs/groups/cid/documents/webcontent/003121-pdf.pdf](http://www.cancer.org/acs/groups/cid/documents/webcontent/003121-pdf.pdf). Accessed March 2016.
2. National Cancer Institute. A Snapshot of Multiple Myeloma. Available at: [www.cancer.gov/researchandfunding/snapshots/myeloma](http://www.cancer.gov/researchandfunding/snapshots/myeloma). Accessed March 2016.
3. The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Myeloma. Revised 2013;1:48.
4. Novartis Data on File.
5. Multiple Myeloma Treatment Overview. Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation. Available at: <http://www.themmr.org/assets/living-with-multiple-myeloma/brochure/treatment-brochure.pdf>. Accessed March 2016.
6. National Cancer Institute. Targeted Cancer Therapies. Available at: <http://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/types/targeted-therapies/targeted-therapies-fact-sheet>. Accessed March 2016.

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