

# What is Multiple Myeloma?

Multiple myeloma is a disease that arises from the abnormal and uncontrolled growth of plasma cells in the bone marrow.<sup>i</sup> It is the third most common form of blood cancer.<sup>ii</sup>

Healthy plasma cells, a type of white blood cell, come from the bone marrow and play a vital role in the immune system by producing antibodies that help the body attack and kill germs. However, with multiple myeloma, the plasma cells become cancerous and accumulate in the bone marrow, crowding out healthy blood cells. The cancerous cells then produce an abnormal antibody called M protein, which can cause damage to the body.<sup>iii</sup>

After initial treatment, the disease often changes and comes back (called relapse) or does not respond to medication (called refractory). Therefore, continued research into new therapies is needed.<sup>iv</sup>

## Signs & Symptoms

Although some affected with multiple myeloma will not exhibit any signs of the disease (asymptomatic), common symptoms include:<sup>i, iii</sup>



Breakdown of the bone resulting in high levels of calcium in the blood (hypercalcaemia), which causes dehydration, excessive thirst, nausea, constipation, and confusion



Weakened bones making patients more susceptible to fracture



Poor kidney function



Weakened immune system causing more infections such as pneumonia



Anaemia that may result in weakness, dizziness and shortness of breath



Fatigue

## Patients & Prevalence

**3<sup>rd</sup>**

most common blood cancer

Multiple myeloma is the third most common form of blood cancer worldwide<sup>ii</sup>



Slightly more common in men

Multiple myeloma is slightly more common in men<sup>iii</sup>

**66-70**  
years old

The risk of developing multiple myeloma increases as one ages. The average age range at diagnosis is 66-70 years<sup>v</sup>

**about 56%**  
survival rate

The 5-year survival rate for multiple myeloma patients is about 56% in the US<sup>vi</sup>

**126%**  
globally

Incident cases from 1990 to 2016 increased by 126% globally<sup>vi</sup>

**176,404**  
new cases worldwide in 2020

176,404 new cases of multiple myeloma were diagnosed worldwide in 2020

## Diagnosis

Several exams and tests may be used to help diagnose multiple myeloma:<sup>iii</sup>

- Specialised blood tests
- Bone marrow examination
- X-rays and other imaging tests



Continued research into new therapies is needed as multiple myeloma commonly becomes refractory to available treatments.<sup>iv</sup>

## Treatment

Over the course of their disease, patients may be treated with one or more of these therapies:<sup>i</sup>

- Targeted therapy
- Biological therapy
- Stem cell transplant
- Corticosteroid medication
- Chemotherapy
- Radiation therapy
- Surgery



### References

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