

ASCO ANSWERS

MULTIPLE MYELOMA

WHAT IS MULTIPLE MYELOMA?

Myeloma is a type of blood cancer in which plasma cells grow uncontrollably, usually inside the bone marrow, the spongy tissue inside of bones. Myeloma is often called multiple myeloma because most people have multiple bone lesions at the time of diagnosis.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE PLASMA CELLS?

Plasma cells are part of the body's immune system and produce antibodies that help the body fight infection. Myeloma cells are cancerous growths from a single plasma cell. This causes myeloma cells to overproduce an antibody called monoclonal immunoglobulin (M protein) and can reduce the growth of other cells in the bone marrow, including red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets.

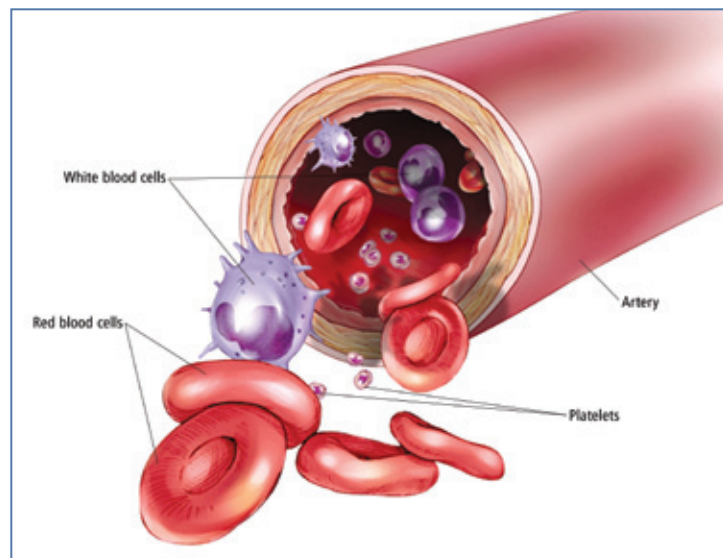


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Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DOES STAGE MEAN?

The stage is a way of describing the cancer, such as where it is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting the functions of other organs in the body. The Durie-Salmon system has traditionally been used for the staging of myeloma. It classifies myeloma into three stages; each stage is subclassified depending on kidney function. Another system, the International Staging System (ISS), is now used more commonly. It has three stages based on the levels of certain proteins in the blood. Descriptions for these stages are available at www.cancer.net/myeloma.

HOW IS MULTIPLE MYELOMA TREATED?

The treatment of multiple myeloma depends on whether the person is experiencing symptoms and the person's overall health. Active surveillance (watchful waiting) may be appropriate for patients with early-stage myeloma and no symptoms. Treatment for patients with myeloma symptoms includes disease-specific therapy and supportive therapy (therapy to manage symptoms during treatment). Disease-specific treatment typically includes drug therapy, such as targeted therapy or chemotherapy, with or without steroids. Stem cell transplantation may be an option. Other types of treatments, such as radiation therapy and surgery, are used in specific circumstances. When making treatment decisions, people may also consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options and the goals of each treatment. The side effects of myeloma treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH MULTIPLE MYELOMA?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your doctors:

- What is the diagnosis?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What stage is the myeloma?
- Is active surveillance (watchful waiting) an appropriate option for me?
- Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
- What treatment plan do you recommend? Why?
- Who will be part of my treatment team, and what does each member do?
- What is the goal of each treatment?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?



Learn more about
multiple myeloma

- What treatment options can help reduce or manage my symptoms?
- What long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/myeloma.

Cancer.Net™

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO®

For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Anemia:

A low level of red blood cells

Bisphosphonate:

A drug that helps increase bone density

Bone marrow biopsy:

Removal and analysis of a bone marrow sample from the center of the bones

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Clinical trial:

A research study that tests a new treatment or drug

Hematologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating blood disorders

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Targeted therapy:

Treatment that targets specific genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth