

Multiple Myeloma - Overview [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 07/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Multiple Myeloma. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

Myeloma is a cancer of the plasma cells in the bone marrow, the spongy tissue inside of bones. Myeloma begins when normal plasma cells change and grow uncontrollably. Plasma cells are a part of the body's immune system and produce antibodies that help the body fight infection. Abnormal plasma cells can crowd out or suppress the growth of other cells in the bone marrow that produce red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. This suppression may result in anemia (from a shortage of red blood cells), excessive bleeding from cuts (from a shortage of platelets), and a decreased ability to fight infection (from a shortage of white blood cells and the body's inability to respond to infection normally).

Like regular plasma cells, myeloma cells can produce antibodies. However, myeloma cells are unable to produce normal, functioning antibodies. Instead, they make what is called "monoclonal protein," or "M protein," which can accumulate in the blood and urine, potentially causing damage to the kidneys and other organs. A person who has slightly too much of this "M protein" is said to have monoclonal gammopathy of unknown significance (MGUS).

Myeloma often causes structural bone damage resulting in painful fractures or bone breaks. Myeloma is usually called multiple myeloma because most people (90%) have multiple bone lesions at the time it is diagnosed. Solitary plasmacytoma is a mass of myeloma cells that involve only one site in the bone or other organs, most commonly in the upper respiratory tract, including the nose and throat. Extramedullary plasmacytoma describes myeloma that started outside the bone marrow in locations such as the lymph glands, sinuses, throat, liver, or under the skin.

Looking for More of an Overview?

If you would like additional introductory information, explore these related items. Please note these links will take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- [ASCO Answers Fact Sheet](#) [3]: Read a one-page fact sheet (available as a PDF) that offers an easy-to-print introduction to this type of cancer.

- [Cancer.Net Patient Education Video \[4\]](#): View a short video led by an ASCO expert in this type of cancer that provides basic information and areas of research.

To continue reading this guide, use the menu on the side of your screen to select another section.

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/multiple-myeloma/overview>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_myeloma.pdf

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/27301>