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Multiple Myeloma - Risk Factors [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board \[2\]](#), 06/2015

ON THIS PAGE: You will find out more about the factors that increase the chance of developing this type of cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

A risk factor is anything that increases a person's chance of developing cancer. Although risk factors often influence the development of cancer, most do not directly cause cancer. Some people with several risk factors never develop cancer, while others with no known risk factors do. However, knowing your risk factors and talking about them with your doctor may help you make more informed lifestyle and health care choices.

The causes of myeloma are not known or well understood, and there are currently no known ways to prevent it. There are also no strong risk factors for myeloma. Mutations or changes in plasma cells are acquired, not inherited, so having a relative with the disease usually does not mean another family member is at higher risk for developing it. There appears to be a very slight increase in the incidence of the disease in first-degree relatives (parents or siblings) of people with multiple myeloma.

The following factors can raise a person's risk of developing myeloma:

- **Age.** Myeloma occurs most commonly in people over 60. The average age at diagnosis is 70. Only 2% of cases occur in people under 40.
- **Race.** Myeloma occurs twice as frequently in black people than in white people for unclear reasons.

- **Exposure to radiation or chemicals.** People who have been exposed to radiation or to asbestos, benzene, pesticides, and other chemicals used in rubber manufacturing may be at higher risk for developing myeloma.
- **Personal history.** People with a history of a solitary plasmacytoma of the bone are at greater risk for developing multiple myeloma.
- **Monoclonal gammopathy of unknown significance (MGUS).** As explained in the [Overview](#) [3] section, a person with a small amount of one kind of antibody protein in his or her blood, called 'monoclonal protein' or 'M protein', has 1% chance of developing myeloma or another blood-related cancer called [Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia](#) [4] per year (see the [Stages](#) [5] section for more information).
- **Gender.** Myeloma is slightly more common in men.

The [next section in this guide is Symptoms and Signs](#) [6] and it explains what body changes or medical problems this disease can cause. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

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

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

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19367>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31258>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19373>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19371>