

Multiple Myeloma

Multiple myeloma is a cancer that begins in the plasma cells of the body. A plasma cell is a white blood cell, found in bone marrow, that generates antibodies and helps fight infections. While researchers do not know the cause of multiple myeloma and are still learning how plasma cells become cancerous, multiple myeloma remains the most common plasma cell cancer. Myeloma tumors can present as a single lesion, in the bone marrow or elsewhere. When this happens, it is called a plasmacytoma. More commonly, myeloma cells are found throughout the bone marrow.

Statistics

- In the United States, one in 161 people will be diagnosed with multiple myeloma.
- During 2009, 20,580 cases of multiple myeloma will be diagnosed in the United States.
- In 2009, more than 10,500 people will die from multiple myeloma in the United States.
- In Texas, it is expected that 1,197 people will be diagnosed with multiple myeloma, and 738 people will die from the disease this year.

Risk Factors

Doctors do not know how to prevent multiple myeloma. According to the National Cancer Institute and American Cancer Society, there are several circumstances that may increase risk:

- **Age:** Multiple myeloma is more likely to be diagnosed in people over 65.
- **Gender:** More men than women are diagnosed with the disease. This year, 2,500 more men than women will be diagnosed with multiple myeloma.
- **Race:** African-Americans are two times more likely to be diagnosed with the disease than Caucasians.
- **Family History:** People with immediate family members who have had multiple myeloma are at a greater risk of developing the disease.
- **Other Conditions:** Having monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS), a condition in which plasma cells make small amounts of a single type of gamma globulin, increases risk of developing myeloma. Those diagnosed with other plasma cell diseases will often later develop multiple myeloma. Some studies suggest that exposure to radiation or working in an oil-related industry can raise the risk for multiple myeloma.

Symptoms

Patients in the early stages of multiple myeloma do not always show symptoms. However, there are several symptoms, which include:

- Bone pain and broken bones
- Weakness and fatigue
- Persistent thirst
- Weight loss
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Frequent urination
- Fevers
- Frequent infections

Treatment

Treatment options for multiple myeloma vary depending upon the type of myeloma, severity and stage of the disease. Anyone with multiple myeloma should consult a medical oncologist or hematologist about treatment. Options can include surgery, chemotherapy and other drug therapy, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, plasmapheresis, and stem cell transplants.

For more information, visit the International Myeloma Foundation at www.myeloma.org.

Sources: American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute, and Texas Cancer Registry