After a Multiple Myeloma Diagnosis

Multiple myeloma is a cancer that starts in plasma cells. Plasma cells are one type of white blood cell found in the bone marrow (a spongy tissue at the center of most bones). Plasma cells are part of the immune system and help fight off infections. If you have been told you have multiple myeloma, you've probably already had tests, x-rays and scans, and a bone marrow biopsy (a test that takes some tissue to check for cancer). Other tests might have been done on the cancer cells to check for certain proteins and gene changes called biomarkers. These tests help your doctor know what stage the multiple myeloma is and what treatment might help.

Treatment for multiple myeloma

Your treatment will depend on the type and stage of the multiple myeloma. Your treatment options will also depend on the results of tests on the cancer cells, your health, and your personal preferences.

Some types of myeloma are not treated right away. These are called low-risk, inactive, or smoldering myelomas. They are found early and usually don't cause symptoms. If you have this type of myeloma, you might be watched closely for signs that it is getting worse.

Some people have types of multiple myeloma that are active or causing symptoms. Medicines are the main treatment for nearly everyone with these types of multiple myeloma. Most often, 2 to 4 different kinds of medicines are combined to make them work better.

Other treatments that can be given include a stem cell transplant or radiation. Several treatments can also be used to help prevent or relieve symptoms of multiple myeloma like low blood counts and infections. Sometimes, they are given along with other treatments. Your doctor will help you decide which treatments are best for you.

Be sure to ask:

- What is the stage of the multiple myeloma, and what does that mean?
- Will I need more tests?
- What treatment do you think is best for me?
- What is the goal of treatment?
- Will I need other types of treatment, too?
- Would a stem cell transplant work for me?

What to expect before and during treatment

Your cancer care team will explain your treatment plan to you. This team may include different doctors, nurses, and other health care workers, depending on the type of treatment you need. For example, if you need chemo, you will go through cycles of treatment with tests and checkups in between. Your cancer care team will help you understand what to expect before, during, and after each treatment. They will explain how the treatment is given, help you get ready for it, keep track of how you're doing, and help you manage any side effects. You will also get tests at certain times to see how well your treatment is working.

Not everyone going through treatment for multiple myeloma has the same side effects. For example, a person might have chemo. The side effects of chemo are different from the side effects of radiation, targeted therapy, or a stem cell transplant. And people getting the same treatment might have different side effects.

Be sure to ask:

- What side effects might I have, and what can I do about them?
- How will we know if the treatment is working?
- How often will I get treatment? How long will it last?
- Where will I go to get treatment? Can I drive myself?
- Will I be able to keep doing my usual activities, like work and exercise?
- Should I think about a stem cell transplant? If so, when?
- Are there any clinical trials that might be right for me?

What to expect after treatment

After treatment, ask your cancer doctor for a treatment summary and follow-up plan. This is called a survivorship care plan. Your cancer doctor will work with your family or primary care doctor to help manage side effects from treatment and check your general health. You will have regular tests to check if your cancer has come back or if a new cancer has started in a different part of your body.

People who have had multiple myeloma are at risk of having it again or getting certain other types of cancer. Even if you feel fine after finishing treatment, it's important to ask your cancer care team about a regular schedule for follow-up blood and urine tests to check if your multiple myeloma has come back.

For some people, the cancer might not go away completely. They might continue to get treatment, and tests will still be needed to see how well it's working.

Be sure to ask:

- Where do I get a copy of my treatment summary and follow-up plan?
- How often do I need to see my cancer care team?
- When and how should I contact them?
- Will I need more blood tests and bone marrow biopsies? How often do I need them?
- Will I need other tests to see if my cancer has come back, or to check for problems from my treatment?
- Do I need any screening tests, like a mammogram or colonoscopy, to find other cancers early?
- Are there late or long-term side effects from treatment that I should watch for?
- Where can I find my medical records after treatment?

Staying healthy

Be sure to tell your doctor or cancer care team if any treatment side effects don't go away or if you have any new symptoms.

There are things you can do to help keep yourself healthy during and after treatment. Because multiple myeloma and its treatment can increase your risk of infection, you should avoid people who are sick. Not smoking may help reduce your chances of multiple myeloma getting worse or coming back. Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, eating well, being active, and avoiding alcohol can also help you stay healthy and may lower your risk of getting other cancers.

Dealing with your feelings

Having multiple myeloma might make you feel isolated, scared, sad, or nervous. It's normal to have these feelings, and there are ways to help you cope with them.

- Don't try to deal with your feelings by yourself. Talk about them, no matter what they are.
- It's OK to feel sad or down once in a while, but let your cancer care team know if you have these feelings for more than a few days.
- If your doctor says it's OK, continue doing things you enjoy like spending time outdoors, going to a movie or sporting event, or going out to dinner.
- Get help with tasks like cooking and cleaning.

You might want to reach out to friends, family, or religious leaders or groups. Counseling or a support group can also help. Tell your cancer care team how you are feeling. They can help you find the right support.

For more information and support, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/multiplemyeloma or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.

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