

# Multiple Myeloma: Risk Factors



## What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. Risk factors for a certain type of cancer might include smoking, diet, family history, or many other things. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer.

Things you should know about risk factors for cancer:

- Risk factors can increase a person's risk, but they don't always cause the disease.
- Some people with risk factors never develop cancer. Other people with cancer have no known risk factors.
- Some risk factors are very well known. But there's ongoing research about risk factors for many types of cancer.

Some risk factors, such as your age and family history, are not under your control. But others may be things you can change. Knowing the risk factors can help you make choices that might help lower your risk. For instance, if an unhealthy diet is a risk factor, you may choose to eat healthy foods. If excess weight is a risk factor, you may decide to try to lose weight.

## Who is at risk for multiple myeloma?

Anyone can get multiple myeloma. But there are some factors that can increase your risk, such as:

- **Older age.** Most people who have this cancer are over age 65. It's very rare before age 40.
- **Race and ethnicity.** African Americans have more than twice the risk as white Americans. The reason is unknown. Multiple myeloma is more common in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean.
- **Gender.** Men have a slightly higher risk than women.
- **Family history.** People with a family history of multiple myeloma have an increased risk. Still, most people who get it don't have a family history of the disease.
- **Having a solitary plasmacytoma.** People who have had a single plasma cell tumor are more likely to get multiple myeloma at some point.
- **Having monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS).** In this condition, abnormal plasma cells make too much of a specific antibody (M protein). This can be found in your blood. It doesn't cause symptoms like it does in myeloma. Still, people with MGUS are more likely to go on to get multiple myeloma.
- **Exposure to radiation or to certain chemicals.** People exposed to high levels of radiation seem to have a higher risk. Being exposed to certain chemicals, such as benzene and some pesticides and herbicides, can also raise your risk. Carpenters, furniture makers, and paper makers may be at higher risk.
- **Obesity or overweight.** People who are obese or overweight have a higher risk of developing multiple myeloma.

## What are your risk factors?

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for multiple myeloma and what you can do about them.

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