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After Multiple Myeloma Treatment

Living as a Cancer Survivor

For many people, cancer treatment often raises questions about next steps as a survivor.

- [Living as a Multiple Myeloma Survivor](#)

Cancer Concerns After Treatment

It is very common to have questions about cancer coming back or treatment no longer working.

- [Second Cancers After Multiple Myeloma](#)

Living as a Multiple Myeloma Survivor

For some people with multiple myeloma, treatment can remove or destroy the cancer. The end of treatment can be both stressful and exciting. You may be relieved to finish treatment, but it's hard not to worry about cancer coming back. This is very common if you've had cancer.

For other people, the cancer might never go away completely. Some people may get regular treatment with [chemotherapy and other drugs](#)¹, [radiation therapy](#)², or other treatments to try and help keep the cancer in check. Learning to live with cancer that

does not go away can be difficult and very stressful. Life after multiple myeloma means returning to some familiar things and making some new choices.

Follow-up care

During and after treatment, it's very important to go to all follow-up appointments. During these visits, your doctors will ask about symptoms, examine you, and order blood tests or [imaging studies](#)³ such as CT scans or x-rays. Follow-up is needed to see if the cancer has come back, if more treatment is needed, and to check for any [side effects](#)⁴. This is the time for you to talk to your cancer care team about any changes or problems you notice and any questions or concerns you have.

Almost any cancer treatment can have side effects. Some last for a few weeks to several months, but others can be permanent. Don't hesitate to tell your cancer care team about any symptoms or side effects that bother you so they can help you manage them.

Ask your doctor for a survivorship care plan

Talk with your doctor about developing a [survivorship care plan](#)⁵ for you. This plan might include:

- A suggested schedule for follow-up exams and tests
- A schedule for other tests you might need in the future, such as early detection (screening) tests for other types of cancer, or tests to look for long-term health effects from your cancer or its treatment
- A list of possible late- or long-term side effects from your treatment, including what to watch for and when you should contact your doctor
- Diet and physical activity suggestions
- Reminders to keep your appointments with your primary care provider (PCP), who will monitor your general health care

Keeping health insurance and copies of your medical records

Even after treatment, it's very important to keep health insurance. Tests and doctor visits cost a lot, and even though no one wants to think about their cancer coming back, this could happen.

At some point after your cancer treatment, you might find yourself seeing a new doctor who doesn't know about your medical history. It's important to keep copies of your medical records to give your new doctor the details of your diagnosis and treatment. Learn more in [Keeping Copies of Important Medical Records](#)⁶.

Can I lower my risk of multiple myeloma progressing or coming back?

If you have (or have had) multiple myeloma, you probably want to know if there are things you can do that might lower your risk of the cancer growing or coming back, such as exercising, eating a certain type of diet, or taking nutritional supplements.

Adopting healthy behaviors such as [not smoking](#)⁷, [eating well](#)⁸, [getting regular physical activity](#)⁹, and [staying at a healthy weight](#)¹⁰ might help, but no one knows for sure. However, we do know that these types of changes can have positive effects on your health that can extend beyond your risk of myeloma or other cancers.

About dietary supplements

So far, no [dietary supplements](#)¹¹ (including vitamins, minerals, and herbal products) have been shown to clearly help lower the risk of cancer progressing or coming back. This doesn't mean that no supplements will help, but it's important to know that none have been proven to do so.

Dietary supplements are not regulated like medicines in the United States – they do not have to be proven effective (or even safe) before being sold, although there are limits on what they're allowed to claim they can do. If you're thinking about taking any type of nutritional supplement, talk to your health care team. They can help you decide which ones you can use safely while avoiding those that might be harmful.

If the cancer comes back

If the cancer does recur at some point, your treatment options will depend on where the cancer is located, what treatments you've had before, and your health. For more information on how recurrent cancer is treated, see [Treatment Choices for Multiple Myeloma, by Stage](#).¹²

For more general information on recurrence, you may also want to see [Understanding Recurrence](#)¹³.

Second cancers after treatment

People who've had multiple myeloma can still get other cancers. In fact, multiple myeloma survivors are at higher risk for getting some other types of cancer. Learn more in [Second Cancers After Multiple Myeloma](#).

Getting emotional support

Some amount of feeling depressed, anxious, or worried is normal when multiple myeloma is a part of your life. Some people are affected more than others. But everyone can benefit from help and support from other people, whether friends and family, religious groups, support groups, professional counselors, or others. Learn more in [Life After Cancer](#)¹⁴.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/multiple-myeloma/treating/chemotherapy.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/multiple-myeloma/treating/radiation.html
3. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests/imaging-radiology-tests-for-cancer.html
4. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects.html
5. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/survivorship-care-plans.html
6. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/keeping-copies-of-important-medical-records.html
7. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
8. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/eat-healthy.html
9. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/get-active.html
10. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/take-control-your-weight.html
11. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/complementary-and-alternative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html
12. www.cancer.org/cancer/multiple-myeloma/treating/by-stage.html
13. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html
14. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/be-healthy-after-treatment/life-after-cancer.html

References

Rock CL, Thomson C, Gansler T, et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2020;70(4). doi:10.3322/caac.21591. Accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21591> on June 9, 2020.

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Second Cancers After Multiple Myeloma

Cancer survivors can be affected by a number of health problems, but often their greatest concern is facing cancer again. If a cancer comes back after treatment it is called a [recurrence](#)¹. But some cancer survivors may develop a new, unrelated cancer later. This is called a second cancer. No matter what type of cancer you have had, it is still possible to get another (new) cancer, even after surviving the first.

Unfortunately, being treated for cancer doesn't mean you can't get another cancer. People who have had cancer can still get the same types of cancers that other people get. In fact, certain types of cancer and cancer treatments can be linked to a higher risk of certain second cancers.

Survivors of multiple myeloma can get any type of second cancer, but they have an increased risk of:

- [Acute myeloid leukemia \(AML\)](#)²
- [Myelodysplastic syndrome \(MDS\)](#)³

Follow-up after multiple myeloma treatment

Patients with multiple myeloma need to see their doctors regularly. Treatment often doesn't cure this cancer, but can cause it to regress or go away for a time. If the cancer comes back or worsens, treatment may begin again. Let your doctor know about any new symptoms or problems, because they could be caused by the myeloma or by a new disease or second cancer.

Can I lower my risk of getting a second cancer?

There are steps you can take to lower your risk and stay as healthy as possible. For example, multiple myeloma survivors should do their best to stay away from all [tobacco products](#)⁴ and [tobacco smoke](#)⁵, as smoking increases the risk of many cancers.

To help maintain good health, multiple myeloma survivors should also:

- Get to and stay at a [healthy weight](#)⁶
- Keep [physically active](#)⁷ and limit the time you spend sitting or lying down
- Follow a [healthy eating pattern](#)⁸ that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limits or avoids red and processed meats, sugary drinks, and highly processed foods
- Not drink [alcohol](#)⁹. If you do drink, have no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 per day for men

These steps may also lower the risk of some other health problems.

See [Second Cancers in Adults](#)¹⁰ for more information about causes of second cancers.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/understanding-recurrence.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/acute-myeloid-leukemia.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/myelodysplastic-syndrome.html
4. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/tobacco-and-cancer/secondhand-smoke.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/body-weight-and-cancer-risk.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity.html
8. www.cancer.org/healthy/eat-healthy-get-active/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/diet-physical-activity/alcohol-use-and-cancer.html
10. www.cancer.org/treatment/treatments-and-side-effects/physical-side-effects/second-cancers-in-adults.html

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Mailankody S, Pfeiffer RM, Kristinsson SY, et al. Risk of acute myeloid leukemia and myelodysplastic syndromes after multiple myeloma and its precursor disease (MGUS). *Blood*. 2011;118(15):4086-4092.

Rock CL, Thomson C, Gansler T, et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*. 2020;70(4). doi:10.3322/caac.21591. Accessed at <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.3322/caac.21591> on June 9, 2020.

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Written by

The American Cancer Society medical and editorial content team
(www.cancer.org/cancer/acs-medical-content-and-news-staff.html)

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