

## Stronger Together

By working together with Canadian support groups, the Scientific Advisory Board and the International Myeloma Foundation, Myeloma Canada aims to provide education and support, raise awareness of this devastating disease and help drive efforts towards a cure.

*"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."*

*-Helen Keller*

## Help Fund Research and Important Educational Programmes

Your generous support will help Myeloma Canada promote its mission and extend its services to the myeloma community at large.

Myeloma Canada is a registered charity providing tax receipts to donors. Donations can be made online at [www.myelomacanada.ca](http://www.myelomacanada.ca) or you can contact us for additional information.

This brochure was made possible through support from



**Please note that the information contained in this brochure is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified healthcare professional.**

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## EDUCATION • AWARENESS ACCESS • RESEARCH

Information and Support  
for Canadians Living with  
Multiple Myeloma

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## Myeloma Canada

Myeloma Canada is a federally incorporated non-profit organization created by, and for, people living with multiple myeloma. Working with over a dozen local support groups across Canada and the International Myeloma Foundation, Myeloma Canada is dedicated to improving the quality of life of myeloma patients, their caregivers and families. Myeloma Canada's goals are to:

- Provide educational resources and emotional support to patients, families, and caregivers;
- Increase awareness of the disease and its effects on the lives of patients and families;
- Promote clinical research and access to new drug trials in Canada;
- Improve access to new therapies, treatment options, and health care resources.

## What is Multiple Myeloma?

Multiple myeloma (commonly referred to as myeloma) is a cancer of the plasma cells, a type of cell found in the bone marrow. Plasma cells are part of the immune system and make antibodies to help fight infections. Because plasma cells are found in the blood, myeloma is referred to as a haematologic or blood cancer. The word "multiple" is often used because the malignant cells are typically not limited to one area of the body but affect multiple areas of the bone marrow.

Although there is currently no cure for myeloma, it is an eminently treatable disease. Many patients go on to lead full lives for years after diagnosis.

With increasing research, the overall outlook for patients is improving steadily.

## What Causes Multiple Myeloma?

Despite the tremendous amount of work that has gone into the search for the cause of myeloma, to date no cause for this disease has been identified. However, a possible link between exposure to chemicals, pollutants, radiation, or other environmental risk factors and a greater risk of developing myeloma has been suggested.

## How Common is it?

Multiple myeloma is quite rare, affecting approximately 6,000 Canadians; it is estimated that in 2006, 1,900 new cases of myeloma were diagnosed in Canada.

Myeloma makes up 1.3 percent of all new cancer cases in Canada and 1.9 percent of all cancer deaths. It is most often diagnosed between 65 and 70 years of age and is more common in men than in women.

## Characteristics of Multiple Myeloma

There are often no symptoms in the early stages of myeloma. In some cases, myeloma may be discovered by accident during routine blood testing. When present, symptoms may be vague and similar to those of other conditions.

The growth of malignant plasma cells in the bone marrow crowd out healthy blood cells and impact the body in a number of ways, including:

- Producing fewer red blood cells, which can result in anemia and fatigue;
- Suppressing healthy white blood cell production, which can lead to recurrent infections;
- Attacking and weakening of bones, which may lead to osteoporosis and result in considerable pain and potential fractures;
- Affecting normal kidney and nerve functions.

Because myeloma is a very complex disease, patients may experience all or none of the above symptoms.

## Treatment Options

In recent years there have been many significant advances in the treatment of myeloma. Patients today have many treatment options, including chemotherapy, radiation, stem cell transplantation, and novel and emerging therapies. Treatment options will depend on the patient's age, disease stage, other health conditions, overall general health and personal preferences.

It is important to understand that myeloma is a disease that affects each individual in a different way. It is therefore essential to be well informed about the disease and available treatments to get the best care. Patients should ask questions, evaluate treatment options and work closely with their doctor and the healthcare team to decide upon the best treatment decisions. Every patient is entitled to a second opinion and has every right to ask for one.

## Support Groups

There is a Canadian network of more than a dozen local and regional myeloma support groups that hold regular meetings for members of the myeloma community. These support groups provide people living with myeloma an ideal environment to meet other patients and caregivers, share information and learn about the different aspects of living with the disease.

Support group leaders are either living with the disease or have a loved one who is. They understand how frightening the initial diagnosis is, and how frustrating trying to find information on this rare cancer can be. Group members can offer advice, educational materials and emotional support. Local support group meetings are open to everyone and family and friends are encouraged to attend.

To locate a support group in your area, go to the Myeloma Canada website ([www.myelomacanada.ca](http://www.myelomacanada.ca)) for locations and local contact information.

## Scientific Advisory Board

Myeloma Canada's Board of Scientific Advisors is comprised of recognized Canadian leaders in the field of myeloma. The goals of the board are to provide valuable counsel and support Myeloma Canada's mission to promote awareness, education and research for the Canadian myeloma community.

## International Myeloma Foundation

Myeloma Canada is an independent affiliate of the International Myeloma Foundation (IMF). The IMF is the oldest and largest myeloma organization, reaching more than 135,000 members in 113 countries worldwide.

The IMF patient hotline is staffed by trained specialists, ready to answer myeloma-related questions on myeloma. The hotline is open from Monday to Friday between 9 am and 4 pm Pacific Time.

Telephone: **1-800-452-CURE (1-800-452-2873)**

Website: [www.myeloma.org](http://www.myeloma.org)

