

Addressing Nutritional Concerns and Eating Well Among Multiple Myeloma Patients



Nutrition plays an important role in supporting your health and well-being during and after treatment for multiple myeloma (MM). Eating well can help maintain strength, manage treatment side effects, and improve your overall quality of life.

This guide provides information and strategies to help you navigate challenges, advocate for your needs, and find support.

WHAT IS MULTIPLE MYELOMA?

Multiple myeloma (MM) is a type of blood cancer that affects plasma cells in the bone marrow. These are the cells that help fight infection. In MM, they grow out of control and interfere with normal blood and bone function. With MM, the abnormal cells crowd out healthy cells. This causes problems like bone pain and fractures, anemia (low red blood cell count), uncontrolled infections, high calcium levels, and kidney damage.

The cause of MM is unknown, but risk factors include:

- Age 60 or older
- Born male
- Black or African American
- Overweight or obese
- Family history of multiple myeloma



Diagnosis often involves blood tests, bone marrow biopsies, and imaging scans to check bone health and organ function.

Treatment for MM may include:

- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy
- Targeted therapy
- Stem cell transplant
- Radiation
- Supportive medications like steroids and bone strengtheners

Each treatment can impact your nutritional needs and appetite differently. Understanding these effects helps you plan meals and manage side effects effectively.





WHAT DOES “EATING WELL” MEAN DURING AND AFTER MM TREATMENT?

Eating well during MM treatment doesn't mean following a strict diet. It means meeting your body's needs in a way that works for you. Getting the hydration, calories, and nutrients that you need will help you tolerate your treatment better. The two main goals are:

- **Stay hydrated:** Fluids help reduce fatigue, support kidney function, and flush waste. Staying hydrated also helps you manage digestive issues, like constipation, diarrhea, and vomiting. Talk to your care team about how much fluid you need.
- **Get calories and nutrients:** Your body needs energy to heal and cope with treatment. Calories can come from a variety of sources. What matters most is finding foods that work for you. Try eating protein, fiber, and healthy fats to maintain strength and manage side effects. But if you can only tolerate bread, crackers, or ice cream, that's OK, too. As treatment progresses, you will get your appetite and taste back and be able to focus on healthy food options.

COMMON NUTRITION-RELATED SIDE EFFECTS

From Multiple Myeloma	From Treatment
<p>Bone pain and weakness: MM can weaken bones, so getting calcium and vitamin D is important for bone health. Movement can also help manage pain.</p> <p>Anemia and fatigue: Low red blood cell counts can cause tiredness, making meal preparation harder.</p> <p>Kidney function: MM can affect kidney health. Hydration and monitoring protein intake can help support kidney function.</p>	<p>Nausea and vomiting: Common with chemotherapy and some medications.</p> <p>Appetite changes: Can increase or decrease due to treatment. Small, balanced, frequent meals can help.</p> <p>Taste changes: Taste changes can include loss of taste, metallic taste, salty food tasting overly salty, and sweet food tasting overly sweet.</p> <p>Diarrhea or constipation: Digestive issues are frequent side effects. Monitoring your fiber and fluid intake can help.</p>

Treatment side effects are well understood by your care team. Notify them when anything feels off, different, or new. Every patient's experience is unique, so it's important to get guidance that is specific to you and your needs.






The dexamethasone (steroid) can really increase the appetite. So, you go from eating too much to not eating enough. With other treatments, you can have dry skin, you can have nail changes. But it can also change your sense of taste, your sense of smell. It's kind of all over the place, but the good thing is that **it's very predictable**. You know which drug causes which side effect. We know what to expect, and we know how to deal with it before it gets to be a real problem."

Dr. Craig Cole, hematology/oncology expert



WAYS TO ADDRESS NUTRITION SIDE EFFECTS

Managing side effects often involves adjusting **frequency, amount, texture, and flavor** of foods. Here are practical tips:

Side Effect	Tips
<p>Large appetite</p>	<p>Balanced, more frequent meals that are high in fiber, protein, and healthy fats are going to make you feel more satisfied.</p> 
<p>Small appetite or large meals are difficult</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aim for smaller meals or snacks every 2–3 hours. • Focus on high-protein, high-calorie options to meet your nutritional needs. • Smoothies with protein powder, nut butter, and fruit are an easy way to pack in nutrients without feeling too full.
<p>Taste changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add herbs, spices, or syrups to make food more appealing. • If you have a metallic taste, use plastic or wooden utensils. • FASS = fats, acids, salts, sweets — strategies to enhance flavor when taste changes occur: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Fats: Use flavorful fats like olive oil, butter, ghee, or coconut oil. ◦ Acids: Add lemon juice or similar (avoid if you have mouth sores/mucositis) to brighten flavors in chicken, fish, or soups. ◦ Salts: Add a little salt for taste, but monitor intake if you have kidney issues, hypertension, or ascites (fluid build-up in the abdomen). ◦ Sweets: Use small amounts of sweetness to improve flavor balance 

Digestive issues (constipation or diarrhea)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For constipation: try beans, whole grains, nuts (insoluble fiber). • For diarrhea: try bananas, oatmeal (soluble fiber). • Stay hydrated to help manage constipation and diarrhea.
Dehydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sip water throughout the day, add fruit slices for flavor, or try broths and herbal teas.
Fatigue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan ahead and keep easy meals and snacks ready for days when you feel tired. • Pre-made smoothies, yogurt, oatmeal, hard-boiled eggs, and soups are convenient and nutrient-rich. • For snacks, keep nuts, fruits, pickles, and cheese on hand for quick energy.
Mouth discomfort or chewing difficulty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choose soft foods like mashed potatoes, scrambled eggs, or smoothies.
Brain fog	<p>Have a list of go-to food items that work for you. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breakfast: Oatmeal with nut butter and fruit; yogurt parfait with granola. • Lunch: Soup with added protein (beans or shredded chicken); avocado toast. • Snacks: Cheese and crackers, trail mix, smoothies, hard-boiled eggs. • Dinner: Soft-cooked vegetables with rice and gravy; pasta with olive oil and parmesan.



GETTING HELP FROM YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM

You don't have to manage nutrition challenges alone — your care team can provide specialized support. Ask for referrals early and often, because nutrition is a key part of your treatment plan. Your team may include:

Oncologist/hematologist

- Reviews how treatment impacts nutrition and digestion.
- Coordinates with other specialists to ensure your diet supports therapy.



Nurses (RNs)

- Monitor symptoms and hydration status.
- Provide practical tips for managing side effects (e.g., mouth sores, constipation).
- Teach safe food handling during periods of low immunity.

Registered dietitian (RD)

- Creates personalized meal plans based on your treatment and health needs.
- Advises on safe use of supplements and vitamins.
- Helps manage side effects like nausea, taste changes, or weight loss.

“It can be predictable, so working with an oncology dietitian — if you have one on your team who's part of the myeloma clinic — can really support and guide you.”

Chelsey Schneider, oncology dietitian



Social worker

- Connects you with food assistance programs and meal delivery services.
- Offers emotional support and coping strategies.
- Helps navigate insurance coverage for nutrition counseling.



Dentist/oral health specialist

- Treats mouth sores, dry mouth, or dental issues that affect eating.
- Suggests oral care routines to prevent infections.



Pharmacist

- Reviews medications for interactions with foods or supplements.
- Advises on timing of meals with medications.

Mental health counselor/psychologist

- Supports emotional well-being, which can affect appetite and eating habits.
- Provides stress management techniques to reduce treatment-related anxiety.



TAKE A PROACTIVE ROLE IN YOUR CARE

Advocating for yourself is essential. Tell your team about changes in appetite, taste, or digestion. Ask questions like:

Nutrition & eating well

- What foods should I avoid during treatment?
- Are there foods that can help with fatigue or nausea?
- How can I manage changes in taste or appetite?
- Are supplements or vitamins safe for me to take?
- Should I follow any special diet (low-sodium, high-protein, etc.)?



Treatment & side effects

- What side effects should I expect from my medications?
- How can I reduce or manage digestive issues, like constipation or diarrhea?
- Are there signs that mean I should call you right away?



Planning ahead

- What easy meals or snacks do you recommend for days when I'm tired?
- How can I prepare for treatment days or hospital visits?
- Are there meal delivery or nutrition services you recommend?



Support & resources

- Are there local or online support groups for people with MM?
- Can you refer me to a counselor or dietitian?
- Where can I find reliable information about eating well during treatment?



“**It does get better.** At first, I just did not believe anyone when they said that. I thought, this is how I'm gonna have to learn to live. But it does get better, and it's a long journey. **You have to advocate for yourself, stand up for yourself.** Talk to your doctors, tell them what you're going through, and reach out to people for support.”

Michelle, MM survivor





CAREGIVING DURING MULTIPLE MYELOMA TREATMENT

Stepping into a new role as a cancer caregiver can come with many different emotions. It is normal to feel overwhelmed, stressed, or even frustrated as you balance your own life with your loved one's needs.

As an MM caregiver, you may provide medical, emotional, financial, or logistical support over time. You may directly support your loved one in managing their nutrition during and after treatment. Other common caregiver roles include medication and appointment management. You may need to assist your loved one with their daily activities. Caregiving for a loved one comes with many responsibilities. These tasks, in addition to your own, can easily become overwhelming.

Caregivers need support for their own emotional and physical health as well. It is important to prioritize a healthy lifestyle and emotional connection. Reach out to other caregivers to hear about their experience. You may find yourself putting your own needs second during these busy times. Your overall well-being impacts your ability to provide support. Be open and honest about how you are doing with those around you, so they can better support you.

For more information, visit www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Caregivers.

Eating well during MM treatment isn't about perfection — it's about finding what works for you. Small steps, like eating small, frequent meals or adding a smoothie, can make a big difference. Remember, you're not alone. Your care team is here to support you every step of the way.



DIET & NUTRITION INFORMATION & SUPPORT

Cancer Support Community

888-793-9355 · www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Diet-Nutrition
www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Multiple-Myeloma

Multiple Myeloma Research Foundation

theMMRF.org

Savor Health

www.SavorHealth.com

American Cancer Society

www.Cancer.org/Cancer/Survivorship/Coping/Nutrition.html

National Cancer Institute

www.Cancer.gov/About-Cancer/Treatment/Side-Effects/Nutrition

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

www.EatRight.org/Health/Health-Conditions/Cancer

National Alliance for Caregiving

www.Caregiving.org



Cancer Support Community partners with Savor Health® to provide free access to Ina®, the world's first and only clinically validated digital dietitian. Ina® delivers nutrition guidance 24/7 “on demand” via a text message and at the time and place that patients and caregivers need expert support. Ina® provides highly personalized, evidence-based nutrition support to help people with diet-related chronic conditions (like cancer, heart disease, kidney disease, etc.) manage their health. Users can receive customized recipes, foods to eat and avoid, symptom management support, and answers to their nutrition questions that are based on clinical evidence, guidelines and the experience of medical professionals.

Register for free here: adcscgc.SavorHealth.com

Cancer Support Community Resources

Cancer Support Helpline® — Have questions, concerns, or looking for resources? Call CSC's toll-free Cancer Support Helpline (888-793-9355), available in 200 languages Mon-Thurs 11am-8pm ET and Fri 11am-6pm ET.

Open to Options® — Preparing for your next appointment? Our trained specialists can help you create a list of questions to share with your doctor. Make an appointment by calling 888-793-9355 or by contacting your local CSC or Gilda's Club.

Frankly Speaking About Cancer® — Trusted information for cancer patients and their loved ones is available through publications, online, and in-person programs.

Services at Local CSCs and Gilda's Clubs — With the help of over 200 locations, in 50 markets, CSC and Gilda's Club centers provide services free of charge to people impacted by cancer. Attend support groups, educational sessions, wellness programs, and more
www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/FindLocation.

Cancer Experience Registry® — Help others by sharing your cancer patient or cancer caregiver experience via survey at **www.CancerExperienceRegistry.org**.

MyLifeLine® — CSC's secure, online community welcomes anyone impacted by cancer to easily connect with community to reduce stress, anxiety, and isolation. Create a personal network site and invite friends & family to follow your journey. And participate in our discussion forums any time of day to meet others like you who understand what you are experiencing. Join now at **www.MyLifeLine.org**.

Grassroots Network — Make sure your voice is heard by federal and state policy makers on issues affecting cancer patients and survivors by joining our Network at **www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Become-Advocate**.

This publication is available to download and print yourself at **www.CancerSupportCommunity.org/Diet-Nutrition**.

For print copies of this publication or other information about coping with cancer, visit **Orders.CancerSupportCommunity.org**.

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