



# Black Clergy Health Brief: A Resource for Pastors

Provided by Health Committee of The Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity

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## March is Myeloma Awareness Month

Myeloma is a type of blood cancer. More specifically, myeloma is a cancer of one type of white blood cell, the type of cell that fights infection. **Myeloma is not the same as melanoma, a kind of skin cancer.**

### Did You Know?

- Black Americans are at **twice** the risk of developing myeloma when compared to white Americans.
- Black patients often face significant barriers to access timely, optimal treatment and care. This is particularly true for patients from low-income communities.
- Compared to white Americans, Black patients are:
  - Often diagnosed at a younger age
  - Likely to incur higher hospitalization costs
  - Less likely to enter a clinical trial
  - Likely to have a more delayed timeframe from diagnosis to treatment
- An estimated 34,920 people living in the United States were expected to be diagnosed with myeloma in 2021, and there is an average of 128,969 people living with or in remission from myeloma in the United States.
- Males are more likely to develop Myeloma than females.

### Types of Myeloma:

1. Smoldering Myeloma
  - Slow-growing
  - No symptoms at diagnosis
  - Requires monitoring but no treatment unless myeloma progresses
2. Plasmacytoma
  - Single site of myeloma cells, such as a tumor in the bone, skin, muscle or lung
3. Multiple myeloma
  - Affects multiple areas of the body
  - Term used to refer to the disease in its most common form

### Signs and Symptoms:

- **Bone Pain and/or fractures**

Bone pain is the most common early symptom of myeloma. Most patients feel pain in their back or ribs, but it can occur in any bone. The pain varies in intensity and is made worse by movement. Bones can become frail enough to break in a minor fall or injury and even during normal activities, such as walking, lifting, sneezing or coughing.
- **Feeling tired and weak**

These symptoms can be due to low red blood cell counts, also called anemia.
- **Getting sick much more often than usual:**

Myeloma patients may experience repeated infections because the body can't fight invading viruses, bacteria, or other diseases.
- **Other signs and symptoms include:**

numbness, tingling, burning or pain in the hands or feet; increased thirst, urination and constipation; and abnormal bleeding, headaches, chest pain, shortness of breath or decreased alertness.

**Having any of these symptoms can also mean that you have another condition or disease; it does not mean that you have myeloma. If you or someone you know is experiencing these symptoms, contact your doctor.**

## Risk Factors:

Doctors don't know why some cells become myeloma cells and others don't. For most people who have myeloma, there are no obvious reasons why they developed the disease. There are some factors that may increase the risk of developing myeloma, including:

- Age: Most people who develop myeloma are older than 50.
- Sex: More men than women develop myeloma.
- Race: Blacks have more than twice the age-adjusted incidence rate of myeloma than whites.
- History of monoclonal gammopathy of unknown significance (MGUS)
- Environmental factors, such as exposure to radiation or certain kinds of chemicals
- Obesity
- Presence of chronic immunodeficiency
- Presence of known inflammatory diseases, such as cardiovascular disease or type II diabetes

## Healthy Lifestyle Recommendations:

Healthy lifestyle habits are associated with improved health outcomes and quality of life. For some cancers, they are associated with a reduced risk of recurrence and death.

Healthy lifestyle habits include:

- Regular physical activity
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Well-balanced food choices
- Limiting alcohol intake
- Avoiding tobacco products
- Wearing sunscreen
- Vaccinations
- Stress Management
- See the dentist regularly to avoid osteonecrosis of the jaw

## How can the Black Church foster myeloma awareness?

- Host a Myeloma Sunday facilitated with the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society
- Provide your church Health Ministry myeloma awareness materials
- Add myeloma awareness materials to outreach events or health fairs
- Encourage congregation to acknowledge any signs and symptoms and to speak with their doctor
- Learn more about myeloma and get support by calling **The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Information Specialists at 844.955.LINK (5465)**. Information Specialists are oncology (cancer) professionals who can help cancer patients navigate the best route from diagnosis through treatment, clinical trials and survivorship.

Here are the telephone number, website and email address:

Telephone number: **844.955.LINK (5465)**

Website: **[www.LLS.org/MyelomaLink](http://www.LLS.org/MyelomaLink)**

Email: **[MyelomaLink@LLS.org](mailto:MyelomaLink@LLS.org)**.

For additional information you can also contact:

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Leukemia & Lymphoma Society

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Sources:

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The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. Facts 2020-2021. April 2021. [www.LLS.org/booklets](http://www.LLS.org/booklets)