

INFORMATION

From Your Family Doctor

Leukemia: The Basics

What is leukemia?

Leukemia (loo-KEE-me-uh) is cancer of the blood and bone marrow. People of any age can get it. The cause is often not clear. You may be at higher risk if you were exposed to radiation or certain chemicals and pesticides, or if you have certain genetic disorders. If you have had blood or bone marrow cancer before, you may be more likely to get leukemia.

What are the different types?

There are four main types: acute lymphoblastic (LIM-fo-BLAS-tick), acute myelogenous (MY-eh-LAH-jen-us), chronic lymphocytic (LIM-fo-SIT-ick), and chronic myelogenous. Acute types develop more quickly, and the chronic types develop more slowly. Lymphocytic and myelogenous refer to the type of white blood cells that are abnormal.

Acute lymphoblastic leukemia is the most common leukemia in childhood, and chronic leukemia is more common in older adults.

What are the symptoms of leukemia?

Symptoms depend on the type of leukemia. In acute leukemia, people may have fever, night sweats, unexplained bruising, pale skin, shortness of breath, fatigue, and achy bones or joints. Chronic leukemia symptoms can include shortness of breath, fatigue, and swollen lymph nodes. Some people with chronic leukemia do not have any symptoms.

How is leukemia diagnosed and treated?

It is diagnosed with blood and bone marrow tests. Treatment depends on a person's age, health, and type of leukemia. Common treatments include chemotherapy, radiation, bone marrow transplant, and special medicines that block the growth and spread of cancer cells. People with chronic lymphocytic leukemia can be monitored without treatment if they do not have symptoms and their blood counts are stable.

Where can I get more information?

CancerQuest

<https://www.cancerquest.org/patients/cancer-type/leukemia>

Leukemia and Lymphoma Society

<https://www.lls.org/>

National Cancer Institute

<https://www.cancer.gov/types/leukemia>

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

<https://www.nccn.org/patientresources/patient-resources/guidelines-for-patients>

National Library of Medicine

<https://medlineplus.gov/leukemia.html>

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