

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, and the cause is not clear. You may be at higher risk if you were exposed to radiation or certain chemicals and pesticides. If you have had blood or bone marrow cancer before, you may be more likely to get it.

What are the different types?

The most common childhood leukemia is called acute lymphoblastic [LIM-fo-BLAS-tick] leukemia. People with this type may have fever, tiredness, bleeding, bruising, bone pain, and a swollen liver or spleen. The most common leukemia in adults is acute myelogenous [MY-eh-LAH-jen-us] leukemia. This can cause fever, tiredness, weight loss, bleeding, and bruising.

Two other types, chronic lymphocytic [LIM-fo-SIT-ick] leukemia and chronic myelogenous leukemia, occur mostly in older adults. Many people do not have symptoms, but they may have a swollen liver, spleen, or lymph nodes.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Leukemia is diagnosed based on blood or bone marrow tests. The treatment depends on a person's age, health, and the type of leukemia. Treatment may include chemotherapy, radiation, bone marrow transplant, or medicine to kill the cancer cells. Persons 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?

Your doctor

CancerQuest

<http://www.cancerquest.org/leukemia-introduction.html>

Leukemia and Lymphoma Society

<http://www.lls.org>

National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/pediatric/treatment>
<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/pdq/adult/treatment>

National Comprehensive Cancer Network: Guidelines for Patients

<http://www.nccn.org/patients/guidelines/default.aspx>

May 2014

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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