

Leukemia: an overview



What Is Leukemia?

Leukemia is the general term used to describe four different disease-types called: Acute Myelogenous (AML), Acute Lymphocytic (ALL), Chronic Myelogenous (CML), and Chronic Lymphocytic (CLL). AML, the most common type of leukemia, is an attacking cancer of the bone marrow and blood. ALL, the most common in young children and adults over 50, is a cancer of the lymphocytes. CML is a cancer of the blood-producing cells of the bone marrow. CLL is a cancer of the lymphocytes.

What are the Symptoms of Leukemia?

The symptoms for leukemia depend on the type of leukemia. For AML, the symptoms are: fatigue, weakness, easy bruising or bleeding, weight loss, fever, bone or abdominal pain, difficulty breathing, frequent infections, swollen glands, and swollen or bleeding gums. For ALL, the symptoms are: fatigue, weakness, easy bruising or bleeding, weight loss, fever, bone or abdominal pain, dyspnea (difficulty breathing), frequent infections, swollen glands, and enlarged liver or spleen. For CML, the symptoms are: fatigue, excessive sweating, weight loss, and abdominal swelling or discomfort because of enlarged spleen. For CLL, the symptoms are: swelling of the lymph nodes in the neck, under the arms, or in the groin, discomfort or fullness in the upper left part of the abdomen because of enlarged spleen, fatigue, fever or infection, abnormal bleeding, and weight loss.

What is the Diagnosis?

The diagnosis for leukemia again depends on the type of leukemia. For AML, the tests that may be used to diagnosis a patient with AML are: blood tests, bone marrow biopsy, lumbar puncture, imaging tests, and subtypes. The tests that may be used to diagnose a patient with ALL is a little bit different. They are: blood tests, bone marrow biopsy, flow cytometry and cytochemistry, cytogenetics, lumbar puncture, and imaging tests. The tests for CML are: blood tests, bone marrow biopsy, cytogenetics, and imaging tests. The tests for CLL are: blood tests, bone marrow biopsy, flow cytometry and cytochemistry, and imaging tests. Some of the factors that may be considered by your doctor when choosing a diagnosis test are: age and medical condition, the type of cancer, severity of symptoms, and previous test results.

What are the Risk Factors?

A risk factor is anything that increases a person's chance of developing cancer. Some can be controlled, while some others can't. Most do not directly cause cancer. The risk factors that may raise your chances to get any one of those types of leukemia are: your age, if you smoked or if you are smoking, genetic disorders, high doses of radiation, if you had a previous chemotherapy treatment, race, viruses, gender, family history, and ethnicity.

What is the Treatment?

The treatment for each type of leukemia may depend on the classification, how healthy the person is, the patient's stage, risk status, the subtype, morphology, and cytogenetics. Some of the kinds of treatments are: chemotherapy, induction, complete remission (CR), consolidation therapy,

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maintenance therapy, re-induction therapy, and central nervous system prophylaxis (preventive treatment), consolidation or intensification, Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia Treatment (APL), Imatinib, Dasatinib, Nilotinib, stem cell transplantation/bone marrow transplantation, Interferon, SCT, Hydroxyurea, and Biologic therapy.

What are the Side Effects of Cancer and Cancer Treatment?

Cancer and cancer treatment can cause a variety of side effects. Some of the side effects are: constipation, fatigue, hair loss, infection, mouth sores, nausea and vomiting, Neutropenia, skin problems, and Thrombocytopenia. Not all patients have side effects.

What about After Treatment?

After treatment, talk to your doctor about developing a follow-up care plan. People that are in remission should have regular follow-up examinations for a few years to see if there is any sign of relapse or late effects.

What are Some Questions to Ask the Doctor?

Some questions that you should ask the doctor are: " What is my Diagnosis?, What does this all mean?, What subtype of (ALL, AML, CML, and CLL) do I have?, What are the possible side effects of this treatment?, What clinical trials are open to me?, Do I need to start treatment right away?, How likely is it that my (ALL, AML, CML, or CLL) will go into remission?, How will the treatment affect my normal activities, including my ability to work or attend school?, What support services are available to me?, Can you recommend a leukemia specialist?, and Where is the best place for me to be treated?."

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What is the Classification for ALL Leukemia?

The doctors classify ALL based on the type of lymphocytes that are affected.