

ASCO ANSWERS

ACUTE LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKEMIA

WHAT IS ACUTE LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKEMIA?

Acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) is a cancer of the lymphocytes, a type of white blood cell involved in the body's immune system. Also called acute lymphoid leukemia or acute lymphoblastic leukemia, ALL appears and advances quickly; patients with ALL usually need immediate treatment.

WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF LYMPHOCYTES?

Lymphocytes fight disease and infection. The three types of lymphocytes—B cells, T cells, and natural killer cells—are found in the bone marrow (spongy, red tissue inside of large bones), blood, lymph nodes, and spleen. In people with ALL, healthy lymphocytes are overwhelmed and replaced by lymphoblasts (lymphocytes that do not mature). These abnormal cells also prevent production of other types of important cells. Lymphoblasts can collect in a person's lymph tissues and spread to other organs, including the brain, liver, spleen, or a man's testicles. The B-cell subtype is the most common.

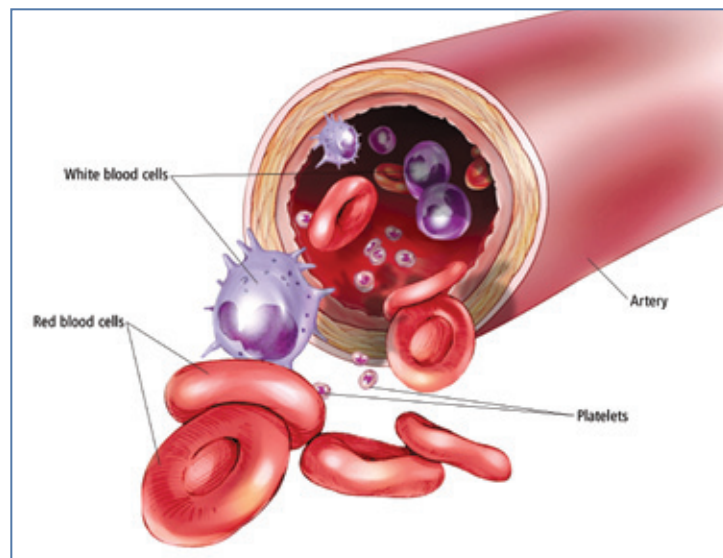


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Find additional cancer information at www.cancer.net.

WHAT DOES CLASSIFICATION MEAN?

To help plan treatment and predict prognosis, doctors classify ALL based on whether B-cell or T-cell lymphocytes are affected. ALL is also classified as untreated, in remission (blood counts are back to normal after the patient received treatment), or recurrent/refractory (disease has come back after treatment or has not responded to treatment). More information is available at www.cancer.net/all.

HOW IS ACUTE LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKEMIA TREATED?

The treatment of ALL depends on its classification and the patient's overall health. Most types of ALL can be cured with treatment; the type and clinical characteristics of the ALL and the patient's age affect the cure rates. Chemotherapy may be given during different stages of treatment to cause the cancer to temporarily or permanently go away and to kill any remaining cancer cells. Several drugs may be used. In some cases, targeted chemotherapy, directed against genes or proteins that contribute to cancer growth, can be used. Radiation therapy is sometimes used to kill cancerous cells around the brain and spinal column. A stem cell transplant may also be a treatment option. When making treatment decisions, people may consider a clinical trial; talk with your doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of ALL treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your health care team.

HOW CAN I COPE WITH ACUTE LYMPHOCYTIC LEUKEMIA?

Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your doctor are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, becoming organized, and considering a second opinion are other steps. Take care of yourself during this time. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE DOCTOR

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your health care. Consider asking the following questions of your doctors:

- What subtype of ALL do I have?
- Can you explain my pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- What is the expected timeline for my treatment plan? Do I need to start treatment right away?
- Would you explain my treatment options?
- What clinical trials are open to me?
- What is the goal of each treatment?
- How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and perform my usual activities?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs related to my cancer care, who can help me with these concerns?
- What short-term and long-term side effects may be associated with my cancer treatment?



Learn more about
acute lymphocytic
leukemia

- What follow-up tests will I need, and how often will I need them?
- Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
- Whom do I call for questions or problems?
- Is there anything else I should be asking?

Additional questions to ask the doctor can be found at www.cancer.net/all.

Cancer.Net[™]

Doctor-Approved Patient Information from ASCO[®]

For more information, visit ASCO's patient website, www.cancer.net, or call 888-651-3038.

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TERMS TO KNOW

Bone marrow biopsy:

Removal and analysis of a bone marrow sample from the center of the bones

Chemotherapy:

The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Clinical trial:

A research study that tests a new treatment or drug

Cytogenetics:

Analysis of a cell's chromosomes

Hematologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating blood disorders

Lymph node:

A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Metastasis:

The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist:

A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis:

Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy:

The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Remission:

The absence of any signs or symptoms of disease

Stem cell transplant:

Procedure that replaces diseased bone marrow with healthy stem cells that create new bone marrow

Tumor:

An abnormal growth of body tissue