Leukemia - B-cell Prolymphocytic Leukemia and Hairy Cell Leukemia - Introduction [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the Cancer.Net Editorial Board [2], 03/2016

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about this disease and the parts of the body it may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net?s Guide to B-Cell Leukemia. To see other pages, use the menu. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

About leukemia

Leukemia is a cancer of the blood cells. Leukemia begins when healthy blood cells change and grow out of control. Blood cells are made in the bone marrow, the spongy tissue inside the larger bones in the body.

There are different types of blood cells:

- Red blood cells that carry oxygen throughout the body
- White blood cells that fight infection
- Platelets, which help the blood to clot

Leukemia is named after the specific blood cell that becomes cancerous, which includes:

- Lymphoid cells. White blood cells mostly found in the lymphoid tissues, such as the spleen, lymph nodes, and tonsils.
- Myeloid cells. These are found in the bone marrow and develop into cells that fight bacterial infections.

There are 4 main types of leukemia in adults:

- Acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) [3]
- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) [4]
- Acute myeloid leukemia (AML) [5]
- Chronic myeloid leukemia (CML) [6]

About PLL and HCL

There are other, less common types of leukemia, but they are generally subcategories of 1 of the 4 main categories. This section focuses on prolymphocytic leukemia (PLL) and hairy cell leukemia (HCL). These are types of chronic B-cell leukemia. B cells are a specific type of lymphocyte that make antibodies for the immune system.

In PLL, many immature lymphocytes, or prolymphocytes, are found in the blood. This type of leukemia may occur by itself, together with CLL [4], or CLL may turn into PLL. PLL tends to worsen more quickly than CLL.

HCL is a slow-growing form of leukemia. It is called ?hairy cell? because the abnormal lymphocytes have hair-like projections when seen under a microscope. As these cells multiply, they build up in the bone marrow, blood, and spleen. Because these lymphocytes are abnormal, they do not fight disease and infection. Eventually, these cells crowd out the healthy cells. Treatment is usually very effective for HCL.

Looking for More of an Introduction?

If you would like more of an introduction, explore these related items on Cancer.Net. Please note these links will take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- ***ASCO Answers* Fact Sheet:** Read a 1-page fact sheet [7] that offers an introduction to CLL. This fact sheet is available as a PDF, so it is easy to print out.
- **Cancer.Net Patient Education Video:** View a short video [8] led by an ASCO expert in leukemia that provides basic information and areas of research.

The next section in this guide is Statistics [9]. *It helps explain how many people are diagnosed with these diseases and general survival rates. Or, use the menu to choose another section to continue reading this guide.*

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/leukemia-b-cell-prolymphocytic-leukemia-and-hairy-cell-leukemia/introduction
[2] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/31282
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/31278

[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/31280
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/31277
[7] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_cll.pdf
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/27376
[9] http://www.cancer.net/node/19080