

Leukemia - Chronic Lymphocytic - CLL - Stages [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board \[2\]](#), 07/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will learn about how doctors describe the growth or spread of CLL. This is called the stage. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Staging is a way of describing where the cancer is located, if or where it has spread, and whether it is affecting other parts of the body. Doctors use diagnostic tests to find out the cancer's stage, so staging may not be complete until all of the tests are finished. Knowing the stage helps the doctor to decide what kind of treatment is best and can help predict a patient's prognosis. There are different stage descriptions for different types of cancer.

There is a relationship between the stage of the CLL and the prognosis. In general, patients diagnosed at an earlier stage have better long-term survival. Importantly, however, there is a wide range of outcomes even for patients who have the same stage, and the stage alone cannot predict the prognosis with certainty for each person.

Below are explanations of commonly used staging and classification systems used by doctors to describe CLL:

Rai staging system (stage 0, I, II, III, or IV)

In this staging system, CLL is divided into five different stages, from 0 (zero) to IV (four). This staging system classifies the leukemia according to whether a patient has, or does not have, any of the following:

- Lymphocytosis, which means there are high levels of lymphocytes
- Lymphadenopathy, meaning a patient has enlarged lymph nodes
- Splenomegaly, which is an enlarged spleen
- Anemia, meaning low levels of red blood cells
- Thrombocytopenia, meaning low levels of platelets
- Hepatomegaly, which is an enlarged liver

This chart summarizes the Rai stages.

Rai Stage	High levels of lymphocytes	Enlarged lymph nodes	Enlarged spleen or liver	Anemia	Low levels platelets
0	Yes	No	No	No	No
I	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
II	Yes	Yes or no	Yes	No	No
III	Yes	Yes or no	Yes or no	Yes	No
IV	Yes	Yes or no	Yes or no	Yes or no	Yes

Chart adapted from the American Society of Hematology, Kay et. al. 2002, vol. 1:193, Table 8[3].

Stage 0: The patient has lymphocytosis with more than 5000 lymphocytes per microliter of blood, but no other physical signs.

Stage I: The patient has lymphocytosis and enlarged lymph nodes. The patient does not have an enlarged liver or spleen, anemia, or low levels of platelets.

Stage II: The patient has lymphocytosis and an enlarged spleen and/or liver and may or may not have swollen lymph nodes.

Stage III: The patient has lymphocytosis and anemia. The patient may or may not have swollen lymph nodes and an enlarged liver or spleen.

Stage IV: The patient has lymphocytosis and low levels of platelets. The patient may or may not have swollen lymph nodes, an enlarged liver or spleen, or anemia.

If the CLL grows and worsens, the stage may change over time.

Risk group

Sometimes the phrase "risk group" is used to indicate the likelihood that the disease may worsen and require treatment [4].

Low risk: Rai stage 0

Intermediate risk: Rai stages I and II

High risk: Rai stages III and IV

Binet classification (stage A, B, or C)

European doctors use a different staging system, based on whether the CLL is found in the lymph nodes in the neck, under the arms, or in the groin area and whether the patient has low levels of red blood cells or platelets. The stages are called A, B, and C.

Binet stage	Number of enlarged lymph node areas	Anemia	Low levels of platelets
A	Less than 3	No	No
B	3 or more	No	No
C	Any number	Yes (or low platelets)	Yes (or anemia)

Chart adapted from the American Society of Hematology, Kay et. al.2002, vol. 1:193, Table 8 [3].

Stage A: The patient does not have anemia or low levels of platelets. The cancer can be felt in fewer than three areas of lymph nodes (Rai stages 0, I and II).

Stage B: The patient does not have anemia or low levels of platelets. The cancer is in three or more areas of lymph nodes (Rai stages I and II).

Stage C: The patient has anemia and/or low levels of platelets. The cancer is in any number of lymph nodes (Rai stages III and IV).

Information about the stage of CLL will help the doctor recommend a treatment plan. The next section helps explain the treatment options for CLL. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select Treatment Options, or you can select another section, to continue reading this guide.

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/leukemia-chronic-lymphocytic-cll/stages>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.asheducationbook.org/cgi/content-nw/full/2002/1/193/T8>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19099>