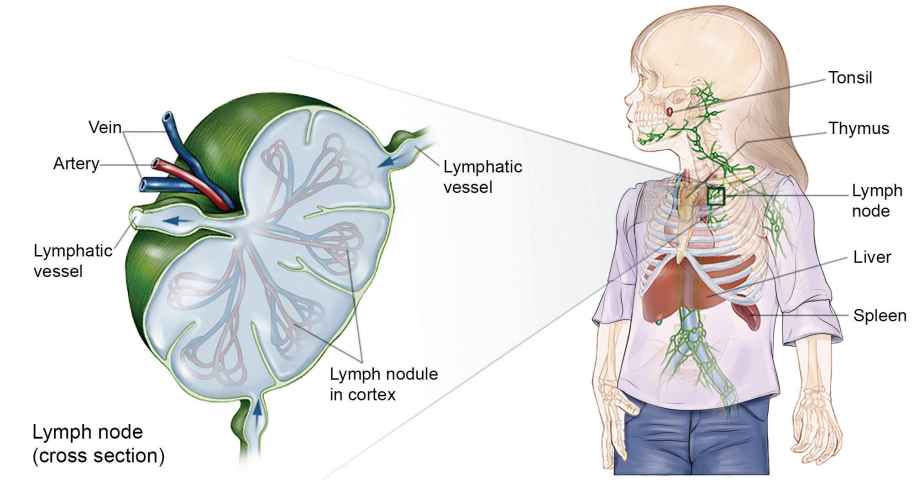
ASCO® answers

Childhood Hodgkin Lymphoma

What is Hodgkin lymphoma?

Hodgkin lymphoma is a cancer of the lymphatic system in which lymphatic cells change and grow out of control and may form a tumor. There are 2 main types of Hodgkin lymphoma: classical and nodular lymphocyte predominant. There are 4 subtypes of classical: nodular sclerosing, mixed cellularity, lymphocyte rich, and lymphocyte depleted. There is a childhood form of Hodgkin lymphoma that most commonly occurs in children ages 14 or younger, a young adult form that occurs in adolescents and young adults between the ages of 15 and 34, and an older adult form. This fact sheet covers children and adolescents.



What is the function of the lymphatic system?

The lymphatic system consists of thin tubes that branch out to all parts of the body to carry lymph, a clear fluid containing lymphocytes, which are white blood cells. The lymphatic system is an important part of the immune system that fights infection and disease. Hodgkin lymphoma commonly affects the lymph nodes in the neck or the area between the lungs and behind the breastbone. The cancer can spread outside the lymphatic system, most often to the lungs, bones, bone marrow, and liver.

What does stage mean?

The stage 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. There are 4 stages for Hodgkin lymphoma: stages I through IV (1 through 4). More information is available at www.cancer.net/childhodgkin.

How is Hodgkin lymphoma treated?

The amount and type of treatment depends on the number of involved lymph nodes (areas of cancer) and how large the lymph nodes have grown. Combinations of chemotherapy drugs are used to treat Hodgkin lymphoma. Children and adolescents may also receive radiation therapy in addition to chemotherapy. If the disease returns following treatment, a bone marrow/stem cell transplant may be recommended.

When making treatment decisions, consider a clinical trial; most children with cancer are treated as part of one. Clinical trials are an option to consider for treatment and care for all stages of cancer. Talk with your child's doctor about all treatment options. The side effects of Hodgkin lymphoma treatment can often be prevented or managed with the help of your child's health care team. This is called supportive care or palliative care and is an important part of your child's overall treatment plan.

How can I help my child or teen cope with Hodgkin lymphoma?

Helping your child or teenager understand a cancer diagnosis is a key part of the coping process. Children and adolescents with cancer should be treated at a cancer center with access to pediatric specialists. Absorbing the news of a cancer diagnosis and communicating with your child's health care team are key parts of the coping process. Seeking support, organizing your child's health information, making sure all of your questions are answered, and participating in the decision-making process are other steps. Talk with your child's health care team about any concerns. Understanding your emotions and those of people close to you can be helpful in managing the diagnosis, treatment, and healing process.

ASCO ANSWERS is a collection of oncologist-approved patient education materials developed by the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) for people with cancer and their caregivers.

Questions to ask the health care team

Regular communication is important in making informed decisions about your child's health care. It can be helpful to bring someone along to appointments to take notes. Consider asking the following questions of your child's health care team:

- What type and subtype of Hodgkin lymphoma has been diagnosed?
- What stage and risk group is my child's lymphoma? What does this mean?
- Can you explain my child's pathology report (laboratory test results) to me?
- Would you explain my child's treatment options?
- What clinical trials are available for my child? Where are they located, and how do I find out more about them?
- What treatment plan do you recommend for my child? Why?
- What is the goal of each treatment? Is it to eliminate the lymphoma, help my child feel better, or both?
- Who will be part of the treatment team, and what does each member do?
- How will this treatment affect my child's daily life? Will he or she be able to go to school and perform his or her usual activities?
- What short-term and long-term side effects may be associated with my child's cancer treatment?
- Could this treatment affect my child's ability to have children in the future?
- What follow-up tests will my child need, and how often will he or she need them?
- If I'm worried about managing the costs of cancer care, who can help me?
- Where can I find emotional support for my child? For my family?
- If I have a question or problem, who should I call?

Find more questions to ask the health care team at www.cancer.net/childhodgkin. For a digital list of questions, download Cancer.Net's free mobile app at www.cancer.net/app.

Words to Know

Biopsy: Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells.

Bone marrow transplant: Procedure that replaces diseased bone marrow with healthy stem cells that create new bone marrow or provides stem cells to help the bone marrow recover after chemotherapy; also called stem cell transplant.

Chemotherapy: The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells.

Clinical trial: A research study that tests a new treatment.

Hematologist: A doctor who specializes in treating blood disorders.

Lymph node: A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection.

Pediatric oncologist: A doctor who specializes in treating children and teens with cancer.

Prognosis: Chance of recovery.

Radiation therapy: The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells.

Reed-Sternberg cell: A type of abnormal cell found in Hodgkin lymphoma.

Tumor: A mass formed when normal cells begin to change and grow out of control.

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AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CLINICAL ONCOLOGY
2318 Mill Road, Suite 800, Alexandria, VA 22314
Toll Free: 888-651-3038 | Phone: 571-483-1300
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