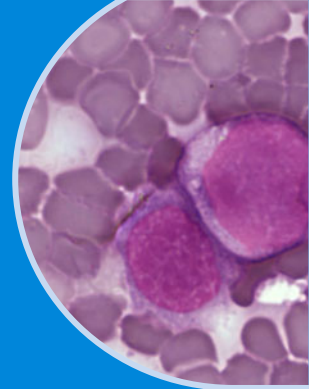


FACT SHEET

Leukaemia - What is it?



About us

The Leukaemia Foundation is the only national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the care and cure of patients and families living with leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma and related blood disorders.

We invest millions of dollars in the work of Australia's leading researchers to develop better treatments and cures and provide free services to support patients and their families.

We receive no ongoing government funding. We rely on the generosity of the community and corporate sector to further our Vision to Cure and Mission to Care.

We can help you

Our range of free services supports thousands of Australians, from diagnosis, through treatment and beyond. To learn more, please call 1800 620 420 to speak with one of our Support Services team.

You can help us

There are many ways that you can help us to improve the quality of life for people with blood cancer. From making a donation, to signing up for an event; from volunteering, or joining us as a corporate sponsor - please call 1800 500 088 or go to www.leukaemia.org.au to learn more.

Last updated: Feb 2011

More than 3200* people are expected to be diagnosed with a form of leukaemia this year—equivalent to eight people every day.

Leukaemia is a cancer that affects the blood and bone marrow where blood cells are made. There are four main types: Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML); Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL); Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia (CML); and Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia (CLL).

- **Acute leukaemias** develop quickly and need to be treated urgently.
- **Chronic leukaemias** develop more slowly and may not need to be treated for some time after they are diagnosed. Some forms may not require any treatment.
- **Myeloid leukaemias** arise from myeloid stem cells and are characterised by the accumulation of cancerous myeloid cells.
- **Lymphoid leukaemias** arise from lymphoid stem cells and are characterised by the accumulation of cancerous lymphoid cells such as B-cells and T-cells.

The most common forms of leukaemia in adults are CLL and AML and the common cancer in children is ALL. Leukaemia is actually more common in adults .

How does leukaemia affect the body?

Acute leukaemias occur when abnormal white blood cells multiply rapidly and spill into the blood stream. Left untreated, these leukaemia cells crowd out the healthy cells, leaving the body starved of oxygen, with little immunity to disease or infection and unable to "plug" wounds in the skin and blood vessels.

Chronic leukaemias occur when abnormal white blood cells fail to die and accumulate in the blood stream, bone marrow and related organs.

Do we know what causes leukaemia?

Factors that may affect leukaemia's development are not clear, but may include genetic history, exposure to intense radiation and certain chemicals such as benzene and viruses such as the Human T-Cell leukaemia virus.

How is leukaemia treated?

A diagnosis of acute leukaemia can require immediate and intensive treatment, often within 24 hours. This can include chemotherapy, radiotherapy, immunotherapies, stem cell transplantation, daily oral tablets or a combination of these. Without immediate treatment, mortality rates can be high. On average, treatment for AML lasts about eight months. For a child with ALL, the treatment period will around two years for girls and three years for boys.

Acute forms of leukaemia can be curable. There is presently no cure for chronic forms, however lifelong targeted treatments many manage these diseases.

The Leukaemia Foundation publishes the guides 'Understanding Leukaemias, Lymphomas, Myeloma and Related Blood Disorders' and 'Living with Leukaemias, Lymphomas, Myeloma and Related Disorders: Information and Support'.

*Projections sourced from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Estimates are calculated using actual diagnoses data collected from 2007 and annually prior to this year.

For more information, freecall 1800 620 420
email info@leukaemia.org.au or visit www.leukaemia.org.au