

# Lymphoma

## What to look for...

Hodgkin's disease, one type of lymphoma, may cause no symptoms. When symptoms are present, they may include:

- Swollen lymph nodes.
- Fever, chills, night sweats, loss of weight and appetite, persistent fatigue, and general weakness.

The symptoms of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, in addition to those listed above, include:

- Swelling or fullness in the abdomen from an enlarged spleen.
- Enlarged lymph nodes in the groin.
- Tiredness
- Changes in bowel habits or bleeding from the rectum
- Nasal congestion, sore throat, or difficulty swallowing

The lymph system is responsible for defending the body against infection and is part of the immune system.

This disease affects the lymph cells or lymphocytes ( a type of white blood cell which fights infections). The lymphocytes are found in the blood and bone marrow and come together in the lymph nodes in the neck, armpits, groins, chest and abdomen. These lymph nodes are responsible for filtering the fluid and initiating the body's immune response.

Occasionally in certain individuals the lymphocytes can become cancerous and start multiplying out of control. This causes the nodes to enlarge and swell. Some types of lymphoma begin as a malignant tumour in a lymph node and spread through to other lymphatic tissue and possibly to organs outside the lymphatic system.

Left unchecked, the cancerous cells multiply and eventually replace the healthy lymphocytes, suppressing the immune system.

The term lymphoma refers to a varied group of diseases that range from slow-growing chronic disorders to rapidly evolving, acute conditions. There are generally two classifications of lymphoma – Hodgkin's disease, and non-Hodgkin's lymphomas which include all other types besides Hodgkin's disease.

Hodgkin's disease tends to spread from one cluster of lymph nodes to the next. It usually starts in lymph nodes in the neck or just under the collarbone; spreads into the other nodes later as the disease progresses.

There has been a very good success rate in curing Hodgkin's disease, especially if it is treated early. Non-Hodgkin's lymphomas are typically more difficult to cure and can normally be controlled for a period of time.

## Causes

The cause of Hodgkin's disease is unknown. There may be a genetic link. Some researchers have indicated a virus may be the cause.

Doctors do not know how to detect lymphoma before it starts causing symptoms. Swollen lymph nodes in the neck, armpits, or groin usually indicate its presence.

Doctors can perform blood or urine tests to determine if the disease is present. And if cancer is found, further testing can determine how widespread it is.

### **Traditional Treatment**

Radiation and chemotherapy are the treatments that are usually used for this type of cancer and have proven to be very successful in eradicating and stopping the disease from spreading.

Since success depends on high doses of toxic drugs and radiation, treatment frequently results in unpleasant side effects and can cause residual complications such as infertility.

People who are now in remission should have regular check-ups with their doctor.

### **Complementary Therapies**

The standard treatment for lymphoma – radiation and drugs can do damage to the immune system. There are benefits in also seeing a naturopath who can advise on alternative relief as well as techniques to build up the immune system again.

Rest, relaxation, and good nutrition are the basis of good health.

### **Personal Care**

The side effects of chemotherapy and radiation therapy are nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fatigue, and vulnerability to infection. Your doctor can prescribe medication to address some of these problems. But you can do a number of things to relieve symptoms...

- Eat light meals.
- Avoid dairy products and sweet, fried, or fatty foods.
- Drink plenty of liquids before and after meals.
- If the smell of cooked food makes you feel nauseated, try eating cold foods.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Rest whenever you feel the need, but otherwise keep yourself busy with activities that will help take your mind off the immediate discomfort.

### **Prevention**

Nobody knows enough about lymphoma to be able to suggest what to do to prevent it. However, by staying as healthy as possible may reduce your risk for cancer in general. Standard advice includes eating a well-balanced diet, keeping your weight in check, trying to reduce stress, exercising regularly, and getting adequate sleep. All these measures contribute to healthy immune function.

### **When to seek further professional advice**

- You detect any symptoms associated with lymphoma.