

Hodgkin's Lymphoma



Lymphomas are cancers that develop when malignant cells infiltrate the lymphatic system. Childhood Hodgkin's Lymphoma develops in the lymph system, which is an integral part of the body's immune system.

The lymph system consists of:

-  **Lymph:** A watery substance that contains white blood cells (lymphocytes) that the body needs to fight infections and the growth of tumours
-  **Lymph Vessels:** This is a network of tubes that collect lymph from different parts of the body and returns it to the blood stream
-  **Lymph Nodes:** These are small structures that look like beans which store the white blood cells that help the body to fight disease and infection. They are located all along the network of the lymph vessels and are mainly found in the abdomen, neck, pelvis, groin and the underarm.
-  **Bone Marrow:** This is the soft spongy tissue located in the centre of the large bones of the body; it makes red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets
-  **The Spleen:** The spleen is an organ located on the left side of the abdomen near the stomach; it filters the blood, makes lymphocytes, stores blood cells and destroys old blood cells
-  **The Thymus:** The thymus is an organ in the chest, behind the breastbone, in which lymphocytes grow and multiply
-  **The Tonsils:** These are two small masses of lymph tissue found at the back of the throat that manufacture lymphocytes

A malignancy in the lymph system can spread very quickly throughout the rest of the system.

Lymphomas are divided into two basic types:

-  Hodgkin's Lymphoma
-  Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma

Lymphomas can start anywhere within the lymphatic system, but Hodgkin's Lymphoma generally starts in the lymph nodes in the neck and more often in teenagers between 15 and 19 years of age.

There are 2 types of Hodgkin's Lymphoma in children; Classical Hodgkin Lymphoma and Nodular Lymphocyte-Predominant Hodgkin Lymphoma. Classical Hodgkin Lymphoma is made up of four subtypes; Lymphocyte-rich classical Hodgkin Lymphoma; Nodular Sclerosis Hodgkin Lymphoma; Mixed Cellularity Hodgkin Lymphoma; and Lymphocyte-Depleted Hodgkin Lymphoma.

Causes of Hodgkin's Lymphoma

The exact cause of Hodgkin's Lymphoma, as with most childhood cancers, is not known. There are, however, indications that poor immunity and infections such as the virus that causes glandular fever may play a part in the development of childhood Hodgkin's Lymphoma.

Other risks may be a personal history of mononucleosis, certain inherited diseases of the immune system, or an HIV infection. Children who have been exposed to common infections before the age of 5 have less of a chance of contracting Hodgkin's Lymphoma due to the affect those infections would have had on the immune system.

Signs and Symptoms

Typical signs and symptoms of Hodgkin's Lymphoma are:

-  Abdominal pain or swelling
-  Breathing difficulties, occasional cough, shortness of breath, or high-pitched breathing sounds
-  Difficulty in swallowing
-  Sweating, especially at night
-  Swelling of the face
-  Swollen lymph node(s), especially in the neck, armpit or groin (Hodgkin's disease usually presents with enlarged lymph nodes)
-  Tiredness or weakness for no reason
-  Unexplained fever
-  Unexplained weight loss

Some of the above could also be a sign of a medical condition other than cancer, so please consult your doctor if your child exhibits any of these symptoms.

Tests and Diagnosis

Hodgkin's Lymphoma can be diagnosed using the following tests and procedures:

- 🧑‍⚕️ **Physical Exam and History:** The doctor will perform a physical examination, checking your child's general health as well as checking for such as lumps or anything unusual and a complete medical history will be taken
- 🧑‍⚕️ **A Lymph Node Biopsy:** This means the removal of all or part of a lymph node so that it can be studied under a microscope for cancer cells, especially Reed-Sternberg cells, which are common in Classical Hodgkin Lymphoma

Other tests that may be done include x-rays, a complete blood count, blood chemistry studies, MRI scan, CT scan, or a PET scan.

Treatment options

Treatment options for childhood Hodgkin's Lymphoma depend on the type and staging of the cancer.

- 🧑‍⚕️ **Chemotherapy:** Most times Hodgkin's Lymphoma is treated with a combination of Chemotherapy drugs. These anti-cancer drugs destroy or shrink cancer cells. Treatment is given over a period of a number of months, with treatments every few weeks
- 🧑‍⚕️ **Radiotherapy:** A very aggressive strain may be treated with more aggressive chemotherapy drugs as well as radiation therapy. High energy rays are used to destroy the cancer cells while doing no as little harm as possible to the normal cells

Some of the treatment options may result in after-effects such as nausea, vomiting, irritation or soreness of the skin from radiation, hair loss, risk of infection, fatigue, bruising and bleeding or diarrhoea. The doctor should explain all of this to you, but if they do not, please ask them about side effects.

Awareness Ribbon Colour

The awareness ribbon colour for Hodgkin's Lymphoma is Lime Green

This article was written on behalf of [Little Fighters Cancer Trust](#) by Billi du Preez of [Red Feather Scribes](#). Please feel free to share the article, but please respect copyright by sharing the article in its entirety, as is, including this paragraph with links at the bottom of the article. Thank You!