



Diagnosing Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL) - A Quick Guide

Contents

This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL)' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Tests for ALL
- Further tests for ALL
- Questions for your doctor

Tests for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia

If you have worrying symptoms, you usually begin by seeing your family doctor. Your GP will ask about your general health and symptoms. They will examine you by feeling for swollen organs or glands, and looking for signs of abnormal bleeding. They may also order a blood test.

If your GP suspects that you have leukaemia, they will send you to a specialist doctor called a haematologist. Your haematologist will ask you to have some tests including blood tests. And will look at your blood sample under a microscope to count the different blood

cells. You may have a chest X-ray or a CT scan.

Bone marrow test

Your specialist may want to check a sample of your bone marrow. In a bone marrow aspiration, the doctor or nurse puts a thin needle into the centre of one of your bones and draws out some bone marrow. Usually, they take the sample from one of your hip bones. In a bone marrow biopsy, the doctor or nurse uses a slightly larger needle to remove a small amount of bone and marrow together.

Lumbar puncture

A lumbar puncture shows if there are any leukaemia cells in the fluid around your brain and spinal cord. This fluid is called cerebrospinal fluid (CSF).

There is more information in the cancer tests section of CancerHelp UK.

Further tests for acute lymphoblastic leukaemia

If test results show you have acute lymphoblastic leukaemia (ALL), you will have further tests.

Blood and bone marrow tests

You will probably have more blood tests. You will have more bone marrow tests at



various times throughout your treatment and follow up care. Bone marrow tests can help to diagnose the correct type of leukaemia, show how well the leukaemia is responding to treatment, and check for leukaemia cells after you've finished treatment.

Scans

You may have a CT, MRI or ultrasound scan. The doctor may use these to check whether your lymph nodes or spleen are enlarged or if there are abnormalities in other body organs.

Tissue typing

You will have this done if your doctor thinks that a donor bone marrow transplant may be a possible treatment for you. Tissue typing is a set of blood tests that show how closely a possible bone marrow donor's tissue matches your own.

Finding leukaemia cells left behind after treatment

Minimal residual disease or MRD means that a small number of leukaemia cells have been left behind after treatment. One type of test for MRD looks for genetic changes in the cells. Another checks for certain proteins made by leukaemia cells.

Questions for your doctor about tests for ALL

- What tests are you going to do?
- Why do I have to have these tests?
- What will the tests show?
- Are any of these tests painful?

Adapted from Cancer Research UK's Patient Information Website CancerHelp UK in May 2012. CancerHelp UK is not designed to provide medical advice or professional services and is intended to be for educational use only. The information provided through CancerHelp UK and our nurse team is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem or disease. If you have, or suspect you may have, a health problem you should consult your doctor. © Cancer Research UK 2012. Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464) and in Scotland (SC041666)

- Can I eat normally before these tests?
- What are the side effects of these tests?
- Do I have to stay in hospital for any of these tests?
- Can I bring someone with me when I have the tests?
- How long will it take to get the results of the tests?
- Who will give me the test results?

More information

For more information about Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia, visit our website
<http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on 0808 800 4040
 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday