

Diagnosing Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL)

A Quick Guide

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This is a brief summary 'Diagnosing Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL)' from our website. You will find more detailed information on there. In this information there are sections on

- Tests for ALL
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You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

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. 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 puts a thin needle into the centre of one of your bones and draws out some bone marrow. Usually, the doctor takes the sample from one of your hip bones. In a bone marrow biopsy, the doctor uses a slightly larger needle to remove a small amount of bone and marrow together.

Your specialist will check to see whether you have something called the Philadelphia chromosome. This will help them decide which treatment to give you.

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).

Further tests

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?
- Are there any risks with any of these tests?
- 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?

For more information, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer>

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. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

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

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