

Watch and Wait

Overview

Types of lymphoma that grow slowly are referred to as indolent or low-grade lymphomas. For patients with lymphoma who are not experiencing symptoms and who have a low tumor burden, it is often recommended that treatment be reserved for when symptoms appear. This approach is called “watchful waiting,” “watch and wait,” or “active monitoring.”

With watch and wait, patients do not initially receive anti-lymphoma treatment. The lymphoma is not being ignored; rather, an active observation strategy is being used to follow it closely. With this strategy, patients’ overall health and disease are monitored through regular checkup visits. In addition, follow-up evaluation procedures, such as laboratory and imaging tests, are performed just as often as follow-up evaluations for active treatment would be. The purpose of watch and wait is to determine if the lymphoma is progressing and how urgently treatment is needed.

Indolent lymphomas are treated like a chronic disease, requiring long-term treatment and monitoring. Periods of remission followed by reoccurrence (relapse) are common.

Doctors recommend watch and wait for selected patients with indolent lymphomas. This approach may be started after initial diagnosis or following relapse, depending on individual circumstances. Active treatment is started if the patient begins to develop lymphoma-related symptoms or there are signs that the disease is progressing based on testing during follow-up visits.

The appearance of the following common symptoms of lymphoma might mean that treatment should be started:

- Recurrent or persistent fevers
- Drenching night sweats
- Unexplained weight loss of 10 percent or more of body weight over six months
- Increasing tiredness or fatigue

As long as the patient feels generally well, and clinical and imaging assessments suggest that the disease has not progressed and no major organs are in danger of being compromised, treatment can be delayed. There are advantages to watch and wait over active treatment for a disease that is not progressing. For example, patients do not experience the many possible side effects associated with anti-cancer treatments that can negatively impact quality of life. Treatments are also associated with expenses and inconvenience for the patient, and there is no evidence as of yet that early intervention in indolent lymphomas prolongs a patient’s survival. With watch and wait, treatment can be reserved until it is needed to fight the lymphoma. In addition, rapid progress is being made in developing new and more effective therapies for indolent lymphomas, which might be available when the patient eventually requires treatment.

Watch and wait is not recommended for patients with fast-growing, aggressive lymphomas. Treatment for these patients is usually initiated as soon as possible after diagnosis. The decision to watch and wait can be difficult for patients emotionally. Patients should discuss with their physicians any concerns they may have regarding the watch and wait approach. The following are common questions patients might ask their doctors:

- What if I am uncomfortable with watch and wait and would rather receive treatment?
- Will the disease be harder to treat later?
- How often will I have checkups?
- Between checkups, what symptoms and other problems should I report?
- How will you decide which anti-cancer treatment I should start?
- How will you know when it is time for treatment?

National Headquarters

115 Broadway, Suite 1301
New York, NY 10006
(212) 349-2910
(212) 349-2886 fax

Helpline: (800) 500-9976
helpline@lymphoma.org

Website: www.lymphoma.org

Email: LRF@lymphoma.org

Medical reviewer:

Bruce D. Cheson, MD
Georgetown University Hospital
Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer

Supported through grants from:



Genentech

biogen idec

©2014 Lymphoma Research Foundation

Getting the Facts is published by the Lymphoma Research Foundation (LRF) for the purpose of informing and educating readers. Because each person's body and response to treatment is different, no individual should self-diagnose or embark upon any course of medical treatment without first consulting with his or her physician. LRF is not responsible for the medical care or treatment of any individual.

Last Updated May 2014

Stay Connected through our social media



Clinical Trials

Clinical trials are crucial in identifying effective drugs and determining optimal doses for lymphoma patients. Patients interested in participating in a clinical trial should talk to their physician or contact LRF's Helpline for an individualized clinical trial search by calling (800) 500-9976 or emailing helpline@lymphoma.org.

Follow-up

Medical tests, such as blood tests and computed axial tomography (CAT) scans, may be required at various times to evaluate the need for treatment.

Some treatments can cause long-term effects or late effects, which can vary based on duration and frequency of treatments, age, gender, and overall health at the time of treatment. Doctors will also check for these effects during follow-up care.

Patients and their caregivers are encouraged to keep copies of all medical records and test results as well as information on the types, amounts, and duration of all treatments received.

This documentation will be important for keeping track of any effects resulting from treatment or potential disease recurrences.

Support

A lymphoma diagnosis often triggers a range of feelings and concerns. In addition, cancer treatment can cause physical discomfort. Support groups and online message boards can help patients connect with other people who have lymphoma. One-to-one peer support programs, such as LRF's Lymphoma Support Network, match lymphoma patients (or caregivers) with volunteers who have gone through similar experiences.

Resources

LRF offers a wide range of resources that address treatment options, the latest research advances, and ways to cope with all aspects of lymphoma. LRF also provides many educational activities, from in-person meetings to teleconferences and webcasts. For more information about any of these resources, visit the website at www.lymphoma.org or contact the Helpline at (800) 500-9976 or helpline@lymphoma.org.