

Treatment Only When You Need It

Watch and wait (or watchful waiting) involves closely monitoring a patient's condition without giving any treatment until symptoms appear or change. Some blood cancers can be managed successfully for years using watch and wait as the treatment plan.

A patient has two options for treatment: standard of care or a clinical trial. It is important to talk to the healthcare team about the best treatment option.

Watch and wait is the standard of care for patients in the early stages of indolent (slow-growing) or chronic forms of blood cancers, including

- Chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL)
- Some subtypes of non-Hodgkin Lymphoma (NHL).

Current research indicates early treatment for some diagnoses is not beneficial and does not improve the patient's quality of life or increase overall survival. Early exposure to treatment also unnecessarily puts patients at risk for short and long-term side effects.

Watch and wait may expand your treatment options. Healthcare professionals are learning more about blood cancers through ongoing research and clinical trials. When treatment becomes necessary, there may be better options available to you than what are available now.

Watch and wait may be the best treatment plan for you. Most patients are able to continue with their normal routine and activities during this time. Through close monitoring with your healthcare team, you will receive treatment when you need it.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WATCH AND WAIT?

- Maintain quality of life
- Avoid side effects
- Avoid treatment complications
- Less risk of drug resistance
- Potential access to more treatment options
- Time to find a specialist and establish a relationship with your healthcare team



COPING DURING WATCH AND WAIT

After a cancer diagnosis, it is normal to feel scared, worried, or overwhelmed. You may be anxious to start treatment immediately. Waiting may make you feel uncomfortable. However, you may not need or even benefit from immediate treatment. Do not think of watch and wait as doing nothing. Through regular checkups and tests, your healthcare team will closely monitor your health and check for disease progression so you can start treatment when you need it.

Focus on the benefits your treatment plan provides. Do not let a treatment plan of watch and wait become “watch and worry.” For some patients, anxiety increases as the time for checkups with their hematologist-oncologist comes closer. Overtime, many patients on watch and wait become more comfortable with the process. During watch and wait, you will likely be able to continue with your normal routine and activities. Some patients report feeling fatigued, but others report no symptoms at all.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING WATCH AND WAIT

You will visit your hematologist-oncologist regularly to monitor whether your disease remains stable or starts to progress. Your healthcare team will use blood tests and physical exams to help decide when it is time to start treatment.

Your partnership with your healthcare team is key during watch and wait. Open and ongoing communication will help ensure you receive the best care.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO DURING WATCH AND WAIT?

Although you will not receive treatment during watch and wait, there are still things you can do to improve your health and wellbeing. Taking control of what you can control may make you feel less anxious.

- Learn as much as you can about your diagnosis.
- Find a hematologist-oncologist who specializes in your diagnosis and establish yourself as a patient.
- Do not skip any doctor appointments, even if you are feeling well.
- Maintain health insurance coverage if at all possible.
- Improve your health with nutrition, exercise and other good health practices, such as not smoking and cutting back on alcohol.
- Take care of your mental health. Join a support group or connect with a fellow watch & wait patient to help you work through your feelings and answer questions.

Your healthcare team may advise you to begin treatment if you have:

- A decrease in your red blood cell and platelet counts
- Lymph nodes that are getting larger
- Newly affected lymph nodes
- Bone or other organs that have become affected by cancer
- A relatively rapid increase in the number of lymphocytes in your blood
- A spleen that is increasing in size
- A loss of overall well-being
- Recurring infections or illness

Questions To Ask Your Healthcare Team

- Is watch and wait the best treatment plan for me?
- What will my monitoring schedule be, and what tests will be included?
- What signs or symptoms will indicate that I need to begin treatment?
- What symptoms do I need to tell the healthcare team about immediately?
- What can I do during the watch and wait period to stay healthy and feel well?
- Where can I learn more about my diagnosis and watch and wait?
- How can I connect with other patients or find a support group?

If you notice any changes in your well-being, reach out to your healthcare team. Do not wait until your regular checkup.

GET SUPPORT. REACH OUT TO OUR INFORMATION SPECIALISTS

The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society team consists of master's level oncology social workers, nurses and health educators who are available by phone Mon.–Fri., 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. (ET).

Contact us at **800.955.4572** or www.LLS.org/InformationSpecialists.