

Sometimes it can be frightening when faced with terms that are not easy to understand and we hope that this glossary will be a useful resource for people who have been diagnosed with, or are having treatment for, lymphoma. Please do call the Helpline if you would like to talk through any of the explanations given here, or if you feel that there are other words or phrases that it would be useful to include. With your help, we hope to continue to improve and add to the contents when we revise this publication. The highlighted text below indicates where there are relevant Lymphoma Association publications which may be of interest. Please call the Helpline if you would like to receive any of these.

Descriptions of specific subtypes of lymphoma and particular chemotherapy drugs and drug combinations have been omitted. Please call the Helpline if you would like further information on these.



**Lymphoma**  
Association

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## Technical terms tamed

Acute	Describes an illness or symptom which is relatively severe and progresses quickly.
Adjuvant therapy	Treatment given in addition to the main therapy. It may be given to improve the effectiveness of the therapy or to improve the body's response.
Aetiology	The study of the causes of disease. <i>'Causes of lymphoma'</i> fact file.
Alkylating agents	Substances which interfere with cell metabolism and growth and which are used to treat some cancers. For example, chlorambucil and cyclophosphamide which are used to treat some lymphomas.
Allogeneic	Describes a transplant using someone else's tissue or organ. Hence an allograft is a transplant using matched, donated tissue. <i>'A donor's experience' - a personal experience of a sibling bone marrow donor.</i>
Alopecia	Hair loss. This can occur as a result of treatment for lymphoma. <i>The Helpline has a number of information sheets focusing on different aspects of hair loss and scalp care.</i>
Anaemia	Shortage of the red blood cells which carry oxygen around the body in the blood stream.
Anthracyclines	Drugs, such as doxorubicin, which interfere with the DNA structure of cells preventing cell division and so mostly affecting those cells which are dividing quickly, such as cancer cells.
Antibody	Specialised proteins made by the B cells of the immune system. They help to fight infection by binding to foreign antigens (substances not normally found in the body) and attracting other parts of the immune system to dispose of the 'invader'.
Anti-emetic	Medicine that can help to reduce nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick).
Antigen	The part of a 'foreign' substance in the body that is recognised by the immune system thus stimulating a defensive response i.e the production of an antibody. In most cases the foreign substance is a protein.
Apheresis	The collection and separation of stem cells from the peripheral blood stream using a system similar to a dialysis machine.
Aplasia	The failure of the bone marrow to produce new blood cells, due to a lack of stem cells.
Apoptosis	Process of 'programmed' cell death which is part of normal physiology, but it can be triggered by chemotherapy drugs and irradiation.
Aspirate	Sample of cells taken by suction using a needle.
Autologous	Use of a person's own tissue (for example, bone marrow or stem cells).
B cells/B lymphocytes	Produce antibodies. During development each B cell learns to make one type of antibody which recognises a single foreign protein. If it comes into contact with the protein (during an infection for example) it divides, making daughter cells, which produce the same antibody.
B symptoms	Significant symptoms of lymphoma which can include night sweats, fevers, loss of weight, poor appetite, tiredness, a cough or breathlessness, a persistent itch all over, and/or pain from drinking even a small amount of alcohol.
Basophil	A type of white blood cell.

Biopsy	A sample of affected tissue which is taken to see if abnormal cells are present and to confirm a diagnosis. Examination of the cells and their 'architecture' or arrangement under the microscope will indicate the exact type of lymphoma. For lymphoma patients the commonest biopsy is a lymph node biopsy. <a href="#">'What is a biopsy?' question time response</a> .
Blast cells	Immature blood-forming cells found in the bone marrow. They are not present in a healthy blood stream.
Blood cells	There are three main types of cells present in the blood, red cells, white cells and platelets.
Blood count	A sample of blood is taken and the numbers of different cells present in the blood sample are checked using a microscope. The counts are checked against a 'normal' range. <a href="#">'Understanding your blood count' fact sheet</a> , <a href="#">'Your blood tests' fact file</a> .
BNLI	British National Lymphoma Investigation. A research body overseeing and assessing clinical trials.
Bone marrow	Spongy tissue in the centre of large bones in the body which produces blood cells.
Burkitt's lymphoma	A rare African type of non Hodgkin's lymphoma which grows rapidly and requires immediate treatment.
Cancer cells	These cells have characteristics which make them different from normal cells by their ability to keep on multiplying, their failure to mature and die, an ability to grow in the wrong place in the body and having an unstable genetic make-up.
Candida	A fungus which commonly infects the lining of the mouth (oral thrush) in those who have a weakened immune system.
Cannula	Soft flexible tube which is inserted into the body, usually into a vein and through which fluids can be passed into the body.
Carcinogenic	A factor which can make cells become cancerous.
Catheter	A flexible, hollow tube which can be inserted into an organ so that fluids or gases can be removed from or administered into the body. For example, a catheter can be used to drain urine from the bladder.
Central line	A flexible tube which is inserted into a large vein in the chest. Certain types of central lines can be left in place for some months. This allows all treatments to be given and all blood tests to be taken through the one line. <a href="#">'What is a central line?' question time response</a> .
Central nervous system (CNS)	Includes the brain, the spinal chord and the surrounding membranes.
Cerebrospinal fluid	The fluid which bathes the tissues of the central nervous system.
Chemotherapy	A form of treatment using drugs to damage cancer cells which, unlike many normal body cells, are rapidly dividing. Chemotherapy drugs work in a number of different ways, affecting different parts of the cell cycle – the different stages of their development. However, some normal body cells, such as the bone marrow and the lining of the gut and mouth also divide rapidly and so will also be affected by chemotherapy drugs.
Chromosome	A small 'package' which contains a set of genes (DNA codes) in the nucleus of cells. A normal human cell has 48 chromosomes.
Chronic	A condition which is long lasting and which normally progresses slowly.
Clinical trial	The controlled investigation of the effects of a new or particular treatment regimen or aspect of care. <a href="#">'How do I decide whether to take part in a clinical trial?' question time response</a> .
CT scan/CAT scan	Stands for 'computerised tomography' or 'computerised axial tomography'. A CT scan provides a layered picture of the inside of the body from which changes in appearance, which are due to disease of a tissue or organ, can be detected.
Cytotoxic drugs	Given to destroy or control cancer cells. <a href="#">'Chemotherapy' fact file</a> . <a href="#">Please call the Helpline for information about specific anti-cancer drugs</a> .
DNA	Deoxyribonucleic acid: a complex molecule which holds the genetic information as a chemical 'code'
Epidemiology	Study of the determining factors involved in, and the frequency and distribution of diseases in populations.
Epstein Barr virus	A commonly occurring herpes virus causing glandular fever. Also known to be associated with Burkitt's lymphoma.
Erythrocytes	Red blood cells.
Fatigue	Feeling of complete exhaustion and weakness, slowing down and tiredness; becoming acknowledged as one of the most frequent and distressing side effects of cancer and cancer treatment. <a href="#">'Cancer-related fatigue' fact file</a> .
First line therapy	The first type of therapy selected to combat an illness.
Follicle	A group of cells. For example, in follicular lymphoma the term relates to the appearance of clusters of cells when affected tissue is observed under the microscope.
Graft versus host disease (GVHD)	The process by which T cells from the donor tissue attack the body's normal cells.

Growth factors	Naturally occurring in the body, these complex proteins control the development of blood cells and their release into the blood stream. They can be used during treatment to increase the numbers of particular types of white blood cells and the numbers of stem cells circulating in the blood stream.
Haematologist	A doctor specialising in diseases of the blood and blood cells.
Haematopoiesis	Blood cell formation, taking place in the bone marrow.
Haemoglobin	A pigment found in red blood cells and which carries oxygen around the body.
Helicobacter pylori	A bacterium that causes inflammation and ulcers in the stomach and is associated with a particular (MALT – Mucosa Associated Lymphoid Tissue, also known as marginal zone lymphoma) lymphoma in the stomach.
Hickman line	Similar to a temporary central line, but made from much softer materials and appearing on the surface of the skin away from where the line enters the vein.
High dose therapy	A therapy using large doses of anti-cancer treatments to eradicate all tumour cells, but which also causes damage to the blood producing cells in the bone marrow. Patients will then have either stem cells (a peripheral blood stem cell transplant – PBSCT) or bone marrow cells (a bone marrow transplant – BMT) re-infused back into their blood stream to replace the damaged marrow. <i>'High dose therapy in non Hodgkin's lymphoma and Hodgkin's disease' fact file.</i>
Histology	The study of the microscopic appearance and structure of cells.
Immunocompromised	A condition arising when the immune system is weakened. This can be caused by disease or by treatment.
Immunosuppression	A condition of reduced immune response induced by treatment. Prolonged immunosuppression usually allows infection to occur.
Induction	The initial therapy.
Infusion	Fluid slowly administered into the body through a drip.
Interferons	Substances which disrupt the process of division of cancer cells.
Interleukin	A substance produced by the body that stimulates the immune response.
Intrathecal	Into the spinal fluid.
Intravenous	Given directly into a vein.
Ionising radiation	Radiation (visible light and x-rays are forms of radiation) that alters and damages cells.
Leukocytes	White blood cells.
Lumbar puncture	A test involving taking a sample of the spinal fluid for examination.
Lymphatic system	A series of channels which join together throughout the body connecting the lymph nodes. The lymphatic channels drain the excess fluid which bathes the cells of body tissues. This watery looking fluid is called 'lymph' and is rich in protein, lymphocytes, salts and water.
Lymphocytes	White blood cells which help to fight infection. See B cells and T cells.
Lymphoedema	Swelling caused by a build up of lymphatic fluid.
Lymphoma	There are many different types of lymphoma. Please ask the Helpline for a copy of <i>'Lymphoma Classification - why does it matter?' fact file.</i>
Macrophage(s)	A type of white blood cell, part of the immune system. These cells ingest or engulf foreign organisms and send out chemical messages to stimulate further immune response from other cells of the immune system when 'invaders' increase.
Metastasis	The spread of cancer cells from the site where they originated to other areas of the body.
Monoclonal antibody	A protein made to recognise and attach itself to a specific 'marker' antigen on the surface of a cell. For example, rituximab attaches to the antigen on lymphoma cells. This alerts the immune system to destroy the lymphoma cells in the same way that it fights infections.
MRI scan	Magnetic Resonance Imaging – a diagnostic imaging technique using magnetic rays to give images of the body. (It is similar to a CT scan)
Myeloma	Cancer found in the cells of the bone marrow.
Myeloproliferative disorders	Diseases characterised by too many of one or more types of blood cells being produced in the bone marrow.
Needle biopsy	This involves sucking out cells from affected tissue using a needle. The cells are then examined under a microscope.
Neuropathy	Damage, which may be temporary, to the peripheral nervous system. Sometimes as a result of a particular treatment, for example, vincristine.
Neutropaenia	A condition in which the number of neutrophils (white blood cells) in the blood is abnormally low and which can result in the body allowing infections to develop.

Neutrophils	Small, short-lived immune cells, sometimes called granulocytes, which are particularly important in fighting off bacterial infections. When called to action, neutrophils can attract a powerful immune response and cause inflammation.
Oncologist	A doctor who treats people diagnosed with cancer.
Palliative	Treatment or care designed to help relieve the symptoms of a disease rather than to cure it.
Pathologist	A doctor who studies diseased cells and tissues under a microscope.
Peripheral blood stem cell transplant	A type of therapy which initially uses high doses of chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy to destroy cancer cells. As the blood producing cells of the bone marrow are also damaged by this treatment, stem cells, previously taken from the blood stream, are re-infused (transplanted) to replace the damaged marrow.
PET scan	Positron Emission Tomography provides a means of diagnosing cancer by using a radiotracer to detect altered tissue metabolism or cellular activity. <a href="#">‘Positron Emission Tomography (PET) - a diagnostic imaging technique’ fact file.</a>
Platelets	Found in the blood, these cells help the clotting process.
Progenitor cell	Precursor cell, an immature cell which can develop into a number of different cell types.
Prognosis	The likely course of an illness for an individual patient, taking many factors into account.
Pruritis	Itching.
Radiographer	A person who takes X-rays or gives radiotherapy. The radiographer will mark up the area to be treated.
Radiologist	A doctor who interprets the X-rays and scans.
Radiotherapist	A radiation or clinical oncologist. The doctor who will decide exactly where to target the radiotherapy and who will keep a check on the course of treatment.
Radiotherapy	Radiation treatment. The use of a very powerful, carefully focused X-ray beam to combat lymphoma. Radiation causes damage to lymphoma cells to a greater degree than normal cells.
Red blood cells	These cells carry oxygen around the body.
Reed-Sternberg cell	An abnormal cell which has a characteristic appearance, under the microscope, of ‘owl eyes’. If present in a biopsy, this would indicate Hodgkin's disease.
Regimen	A particular plan of treatment that is quite specific and stipulates the dose and duration.
Relapse	The recurrence of disease after a period of improvement.
Remission	Complete remission - referred to when there is no disease detectable. Partial remission - when more than half the tumour bulk has melted away after treatment. Good partial remission- when three quarters of the tumour bulk has gone.
RNA	Ribonucleic acid: a complex molecule, similar to but much smaller than DNA. It is made inside cells by using the DNA code as a template. RNA carries information to make proteins.
Spleen	Part of the immune system, the spleen is a pear sized organ lying just under the rib cage on the left side of the body. This organ fights infection, acting as a filter on the blood, removing foreign particles and destroying aging blood cells.
Splenectomy	Surgical removal of the spleen. Without a spleen the immune system no longer works as effectively and results in an increased risk of infection. People with no spleen should make sure that this is prominently stated on their hospital and GP notes. <a href="#">‘Splenectomy and the risk of infection’ booklet.</a>
Splenomegaly	Enlargement of the spleen.
Stem cells	Immature cells, the precursors of the different types of mature cells found in the blood.
Subcutaneous	Under the skin.
T cells/T lymphocytes	Help to fight infection. Each T cell has a cell surface receptor, a bit like an antibody in that it recognises a specific foreign protein. If a T cell comes into contact with a protein that it has been ‘pre-programmed’ to recognise, it grows and divides into extra T cells.
Thrombocytopaenia	A shortage of platelets in the blood. Platelets help to stop bleeding, so a shortage would mean that clotting would be less effective and care should be taken to avoid cuts or wounds.
Total body irradiation	Radiotherapy given to the entire body. Mostly used together with anti-cancer drugs, the aim of this treatment is to kill any remaining lymphoma cells.
Vinca alkaloid	Anti-cancer drugs, such as vincristine and vinblastine, originally derived from a member of the periwinkle (Vinca) plant family.

With grateful thanks to the authors of many previous newsletter articles from which these explanations were extracted.