

Active monitoring



Active monitoring, also known as watch and wait, is a method of managing a blood cancer or a related blood condition over a period of time without receiving treatment right away.

Being actively monitored means that your disease does not need treatment at this point in time. It does not mean that your disease is too advanced to treat, or that you are too old for treatment.

In time, you will be offered treatment when advised by your haematologist.

Active monitoring is most suitable for those patients with indolent (slow-growing) or chronic forms of blood cancer and conditions. If your condition is managed this way, you are generally feeling well with no troublesome symptoms.

This approach is never used on aggressive conditions that require immediate active treatment, such as acute leukaemias.

The conditions that are most commonly monitored during their earlier stages include;

- Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL).
- Indolent non-Hodgkin lymphoma.
- Early myeloma.
- Myelodysplastic syndromes.
- Myeloproliferative neoplasms.

If active monitoring is appropriate for you, your medical team will regularly monitor your condition. This is likely to involve routine blood tests, physical exams and possibly repeat x-rays and/or biopsies. The timing of your doctor visits and tests will depend on your initial diagnosis and how likely your condition is to progress over time. Similarly, the length of time from diagnosis to starting treatment will vary from person to person. In some cases, active monitoring can continue for many years.

Your medical team will monitor for signs of disease progression so that treatment can be given when it is needed. It is important that you report any new symptoms to your medical team. Symptoms will vary depending on your diagnosis.

Treatment will likely commence either when you start to experience significant symptoms or when the results of your regular check-ups and tests indicate that your condition has progressed to a point when treatment is necessary.



Studies that have compared active monitoring with immediate chemotherapy treatment have shown no significant difference in overall survival, in this group of patients.

While being monitored, it is important to avoid the unnecessary side effects of treatment before it is required. In addition, by the time your condition does require treatment, there may be new treatments available. By avoiding treatment earlier than required, you are also minimising the risk of building a resistance to chemotherapy drugs.

While being monitored, you can still be active in the management of your condition. You might like to consider these:

- Regular exercise.
- Eat a healthy diet.
- Reduce stress levels.
- Become better informed of your condition.
- Get your blood tests as scheduled.
- Have your annual flu vaccine (if recommended by your haematologist).
- Be aware of any changes in your body and report any new symptoms to your doctor.
- Seek medical attention if you develop signs of infection.
- Have some understanding of what future treatment might involve – Leukaemia & Blood Cancer New Zealand publish a range of informative materials relating to specific blood cancers and related blood conditions.

Many patients are often pleased that their condition doesn't require treatment when they are first diagnosed. However, some patients might feel worried while living with a condition and having to wait for it to get worse before treatment is offered. This might not only affect you but also others around you, such as your family and close friends.

If you have any concerns, we recommend that you:

- Discuss these with your medical team who will answer your questions and provide support where necessary.
- Talk to your LBC Support Services Coordinator who is always happy to listen and be of assistance.
- Join a support group where you are likely to meet other people in a similar situation.



For more information please contact Support Services on supportservices@leukaemia.org.nz or 0800 15 10 15

leukaemia.org.nz