

WATCH & WAIT

(active
surveillance)

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

You or your loved one has been diagnosed with a type of blood cancer. One of the approaches your doctor may recommend is known as “watch and wait.” What does it mean and how does it work?

This fact sheet will help you:

Learn about the watch and wait approach

Understand the benefits

Find out what it means for you



With watch and wait, some blood cancers can be stable for many years.

Several studies have shown that early treatment does not have benefits for low-risk blood cancers and does not lengthen your life.



What is watch and wait?

Receiving a blood cancer diagnosis can be upsetting and life changing. You may be worried if your doctor suggests that you wait before starting treatment.

Watch and wait is an approach where your doctor monitors your cancer closely and delays treatment until the disease progresses.

About watch and wait

- It is also known as “active surveillance”.
- You don’t get treatment until you need it.
- It is often used at the beginning of slow-growing or chronic blood cancers, such as chronic lymphocytic leukemia (CLL) and some subtypes of non-Hodgkin lymphoma (NHL).

What are the benefits?

During watch and wait, you can follow your normal routine and activities. Your healthcare team will monitor you closely and you will have regular checkups. They will make sure you get treatment if and when you need it.

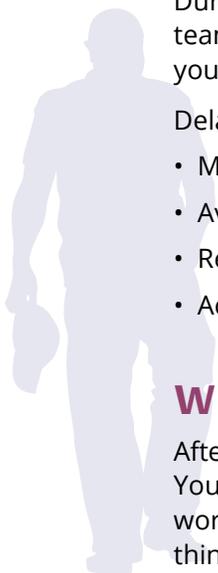
Delaying treatment can offer positive outcomes. You may be able to:

- Maintain your quality of life
- Avoid treatment side effects
- Reduce your risk of building resistance to a drug
- Access new treatment options if they become available

What does it mean for you?

After you receive a cancer diagnosis, it is normal to feel scared, worried, and overwhelmed. You may be anxious and want to start treatment right away. Waiting may add to your worries about the future, but you may not benefit from treatment right away. Try not to think of watch and wait as doing nothing. Remember that you’re being closely monitored, and treatment will start if you need it.

You will have regular visits with your healthcare team. They will check to see whether your cancer is stable or starting to progress. They will use how you are feeling, blood tests, and physical exams to decide if and when they should start treatment. Your doctor may suggest starting treatment if there are changes to your blood cell counts, your lymph nodes, or your spleen.



Questions to ask your healthcare team

Your healthcare team includes your doctor and nurse. To make sure you receive the best care, be open and honest with the team during the watch and wait period.

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- Is watch and wait the best approach for me?
- Are there clinical trials for people on watch and wait?
- What will my monitoring schedule look like?
- What tests will I need?
- What signs or symptoms will tell you that I need to start treatment?
- What symptoms should I tell the healthcare team about right away?
- What can I do during watch and wait to stay healthy and feel well?
- Where can I learn more about my diagnosis?

If you notice any changes in how you are feeling, contact your healthcare team. Don't wait until your regular checkup.

What else can I do during watch and wait?

Even though you are not receiving treatment, there are things you can do for your health and wellbeing. Focus on what you can control. Here are some examples:

- Even if you feel well, go to all of your doctor's appointments.
- Improve your health by eating healthy foods, exercising, not smoking, and reducing how much alcohol you consume (no more than 1-2 per day for men, 1 per day for women).
- Take care of your mental health. To work through your feelings, join a support group or connect with someone else who is taking the watch and wait approach.

Living with a blood cancer can be overwhelming. Seek medical help if you are feeling "down" or "blue" or don't want to do anything – and your mood does not improve over time.

These could be signs of depression, an illness that should be treated. Treatment for depression has important benefits for people living with cancer. Remember, you are not alone.



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