

“Blood Cancer UK: What is blood cancer” video transcript

Title and Intro

This is a film by Blood Cancer UK. We're the UK's specialist blood cancer charity.

You'll be hearing from experts, and people like me, who know what it's like to have blood cancer.

What is blood cancer?

Blood cancer is a type of cancer which affects your blood cells. Your body is made up of trillions of cells, all different types – so your liver is made up of liver cells, your heart is made up of heart cells, and your blood's made up of blood cells.

There are three main types of blood cells: there's white blood cells, which help fight infection; red blood cells, which carry oxygen around every part of your body; and platelets, which help your blood to clot if you have a cut or a bruise.

Cells in your body are constantly dying and being replaced; this is part of how the body grows and repairs itself. Now sometimes in that process things can go wrong; cells might not die when they should or they might divide and grow too quickly. This is what we call blood cancer.

Types of blood cancer

The main types of blood cancer are leukaemia, lymphoma, myeloma, myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS) and myeloproliferative neoplasms (MPN). There are over a 100 different types of blood cancer and they are all treated differently depending on the individual.

Vivian: “I've got a type of blood cancer called chronic lymphocytic leukaemia, or otherwise known as CLL.”

Paul: “I live with a blood cancer called chronic myoid leukaemia and I've been living with that for 10 years now.”

Lisa: “My son was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia in 2015 when he was two.”

Jess: “So I have Waldenstrom's macroglobulinemia, which is a chronic type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.”

George: “I was diagnosed with adult acute lymphoblast IC leukaemia otherwise known as ALL.”

Ellie: “So I was diagnosed with blood cancer Hodgkin lymphoma, stage 2B, when I was 15 so about 13 years ago now.”

Some types of blood cancer are acute, which means they develop quickly and need stronger types of treatment. Other types of blood cancer are more chronic, which means they take longer to develop.

On average 110 people are diagnosed with blood cancer in the UK every day – that’s about 40,000 people a year. It's the fifth most common cancer in the UK and there are currently 280,000* people living with or in remission from blood cancer.

Symptoms of blood cancer

There are many possible symptoms of blood cancer, and they vary depending on the type of blood cancer.

The most common symptoms are:

- unexplained bruising or bleeding
- pain in your bones, joints or tummy area
- frequent infections
- tiredness that doesn't improve with rest or sleep
- unexplained fever
- unexplained rash
- unexplained weight loss
- shortness of breath
- paleness or pallor
- drenching night sweats
- lumps or swelling.

Some symptoms like bruising, rashes and pallor can look different on different skin tones. You can find out how to spot these on the [Blood Cancer UK website](#).

Paul: “The biggest symptom that that kept bothering me the most was this cough/cold/infection that I just couldn't get rid of; and it was only retrospectively after the diagnosis that I realized the other symptoms that I had just put down to getting older.”

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms and are worried about blood cancer, please visit your GP.

There are many different types of treatment for blood cancer and many more are being developed all of the time.

How is blood cancer treated?

In some types of blood cancer the aim of the treatment is to get you into remission; that means there is no sign of the blood cancer or that it is of such a low level it is not

causing you any problems. Some people stay in remission and can consider themselves cured, but some other people may need further treatment.

For some people treatment aims to control the condition and allow them to live with their blood cancer and have a good quality of life.

Sometimes for people with slow growing or chronic blood cancers they don't need treatment straight away, they will be managed by active monitoring or watch and wait by their healthcare teams. Some people are on active monitoring for many years.

Ellie: “So my treatment started pretty much immediately. I was diagnosed on the Friday night and by the Monday morning I'd started on IV chemotherapy. So it's quite fast moving, just because of a situation with where my, um, masses were, one of them was around the windpipe so they kind of had to act quite quickly.”

Paul: “With chronic myeloid leukaemia it's ongoing, so I take a daily tablet each morning. It's a targeted therapy, it's called a tyrosine kinase inhibitor, so it keeps everything under control but it doesn't cure it.”

Lisa: “My advice would be that if you have any concerns about your treatment that that you ask and you get help, because it might not be normal or it might be normal or there might be things that they can do to help.”

What causes blood cancer?

We still don't fully understand what causes blood cancer. We know that blood cancer starts with a problem in the genes or DNA but we don't know exactly why this happens – so unlike with some other types of cancer we know that lifestyle factors don't play a big role in blood cancers.

In addition, you can't catch blood cancer or pass it on to someone else. In fact the biggest risk factor for blood cancer is age, so simply speaking the older you are the more likely you are to develop a blood cancer.

Jess: “So I didn't know why I got cancer, it was a question I asked my doctor a lot and they didn't really have an answer for it.”

Lisa: “And we were told that it was nothing that we did or didn't do, and that it was just completely random and that we were just unlucky.”

Vivian: “My brother doesn't have it, my parents didn't have it, he said it was just a freak of nature.”

What's the prognosis?

If you are diagnosed with a blood cancer your prognosis and outlook is individual to you. Things that can contribute to this can be your type of blood cancer, how you respond to the treatment, your age, your wellbeing, and how early your blood cancer was detected.

The best people to speak to about your prognosis will be your treatment team.

For many people with blood cancer the treatments given can cure the disease and for others these treatments can manage the disease so well that they can live a good quality of life.

As research leads to new treatments, more and more people are surviving blood cancer.

Jess: “In terms of my prognosis, we hope that I'm going to continue as I am for a very long time; but I also have the security that my cancer is slow growing and that I'm getting checked every eight weeks so if things do start to change it will be picked up really quickly.”

Vivian: “I know I'm 75 but I still feel quite young at heart and hopefully I'm going to carry on swimming, going on holidays, and doing all the things that I enjoy.”

George: “It was clear from the start that, uh, the chances for me were not brilliant. I was told the first time around when I was first diagnosed that I had a 40% chance of survival. So odds were against me. I was then put on a clinical trial that wouldn't have been available five years before, or eight years before, when I was first diagnosed, and so I've seen – I mean, I'm living proof of how research makes a difference and how things are getting better and more people are surviving.”

At Blood Cancer UK we're here to support everyone affected by blood cancer. If you have any questions about your diagnosis or just want to talk our [Support line](#) is here for you.

To talk to other people affected by blood cancer, join our [online community forum](#).

**There are now approximately 310,000 people living with or in remission from blood cancer in the UK. (Figure accurate as of March 2026).*