

Leukemia

Leah Davis will never forget the day three years ago when her life suddenly changed.

"I was bleeding in the roof of my mouth, the gums right behind my teeth, the front two top teeth, and I was very weak."-Leah, Patient

Leah went to the dentist. One brief look – and he sent her straight to the emergency room. There, tests revealed that Leah had Leukemia.

"It was surreal, but I think at the time I was just trying to process it."-Leah, Patient

Leukemia is a type of cancer that begins in the bone marrow. There abnormal blood cells are formed that grow out of control and crowd out healthy ones. Leukemia can be either chronic or acute. Chronic leukemia slowly gets worse over time.

"Some chronic Leukemias can be present for decades and produce very little if any symptoms and may be picked up only on routine blood work when they go to see their physicians."-Dr. Sean Fischer, MD, Oncologist

There are several different types of Chronic leukemia. The two most common are Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia, or CLL, and Chronic Myeloid Leukemia, or CML. They differ in the kinds of blood cells affected.

"Treatment for certain varieties of Chronic leukemia include observation and doing nothing at all other than watching patients with surveillance laboratories and clinical exams."- Dr. Sean Fischer, MD, Oncologist

If treatment is recommended, it may involve Chemotherapy, medications that kill cancer cells throughout your body. Another option may be Targeted Therapy, which attacks cancer cells while causing less harm to healthy cells than chemotherapy typically does.

"Targeted Therapies target pathways of cancer development and they may range from targets on the surface of the cancer cell to proteins that are within the cell that trigger cancer growth and development."- Dr. Sean Fischer, MD, Oncologist

Occasionally treatment includes Radiation, which uses high-energy X-rays to kill cancer cells. In addition, those who are eligible may consider enrolling in Clinical Trials which are studies of new therapies.

"Advancements in cancer care are moving very rapidly. And clinical trials and access to new drugs and new treatments are a big part of that acceleration."-Dr. Sagar Lonial, MD, Oncologist

In contrast to Chronic Leukemia, Acute Leukemia gets worse quickly. The two main types are Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia, or ALL, and Acute Myeloid Leukemia, or AML.

Leukemia

"Take some big breaths in and out."

Treatment options for Acute Leukemia which is what Leah had are similar to those for the chronic form. For both forms, the treatment or treatments you receive will depend on the type of Leukemia, how advanced it is, your age and overall health, as well as certain genetic or other aspects of the cancer. Leah received chemotherapy for several months.

"The effects actually weren't too bad. I did have feelings of nausea, but I never got sick."-Leah, Patient

"That is right before the stem cell transplant."-Leah, Patient

Leah then underwent a Stem Cell transplant, which is also sometimes used to treat Chronic Leukemia. In this procedure, blood-forming cells are replaced after being destroyed by high-dose Chemotherapy or radiation.

"There are some patients that have such high-risk disease or poor prognosis disease in other words that transplant is almost mandated from the time of diagnosis if they're suitable candidates."- Dr. Sean Fischer, MD, Oncologist

Luckily for Leah, she found an eager donor who was a perfect match, her brother, Cyrus.

"I didn't think that I could ask for much more. But to have my brother be my donor, that meant everything."- Leah, Patient

"It was a no brainer. It was a gift that I wanted to give to her. I couldn't say no and now she's here."-Cyrus, Patient

Not only here, but in complete remission and feeling good. Leah credits her medical care and family support as well as her positive outlook.

"Oftentimes, when people hear the word cancer, they think it's a death sentence, and it's not. It's holding on. It's having hope."-Leah, Patient