

Childhood Leukemia: Understanding Treatment

With treatment and a lot of time, most kids with leukemia get better.

That may seem a long time away right now...

and it may be hard to imagine how you get there.

Here's what to expect as you and your family start this journey.

When leukemia is diagnosed, you'll get a new doctor who specializes in and has experience treating childhood leukemia.

As part of a cancer care team, your doctor will get treatment started as soon as possible.

Your child's specific treatment depends on the type of leukemia and your child's age and size.

Your care team may need to make adjustments to the treatment based on symptoms and how the leukemia responds.

There are many ways to treat leukemia.

It usually starts with chemotherapy.

Chemotherapy is a type of treatment that includes medicines that kill or slow the growth and spread of cancer cells.

It's often called "chemo."

Chemo may be given in different ways...

as a shot in your child's arm, leg, or belly...

as pills, capsules, or liquids that your child swallows...

as a dose put directly into the part of the body that needs treatment...

or, chemo may be given directly into a vein through an I.V. tube called a catheter.

The catheter is usually put in the hand, foot, or lower arm.

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Your child may get a port that makes it easier to give medicines and do blood tests with fewer needle pokes.

Sometimes treatment involves radiation therapy.

It uses high-energy rays, like a strong X-ray, or radioactive material to kill cancer cells or to keep them from growing.

A stem cell transplant is another treatment option.

The transplant replaces damaged cells with healthy ones.

Targeted therapies are other ways to treat leukemia.

Targeted therapies use special medicines to target and kill the cancer cells.

They also may use gene therapy to find and attack cancer cells.

Other treatment options may be possible.

Ask your doctor about clinical trials for your child.

Treatment is a process that changes over time.

And it changes based on results.

The care team may change the approach or add something new based on how well the treatment is working.

Sometimes side effects can affect treatment choices.

Treatment of childhood leukemia may take a long time.

It can be hard on everyone in your family...

but especially your child.

You don't have to do this alone.

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Your cancer care team is there to treat your child and to support your family.

And they understand that you're new to this leukemia journey.

They expect you to have lots of questions.

They also know that you are going through a very stressful time.

So ask about anything you're wondering or concerned about.

When you understand your child's cancer treatment, it can help you be an involved member of your child's care team.