Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is a cancer that begins in the lymphoid tissue (part of your body's defense system, which protects the body from infections, germs, and diseases). *Lymphocytes* (a type of white blood cells) are found in the lymphoid tissue. Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma starts in lymphocytes. There are different types of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Your caregiver will help you understand the seriousness of your cancer. This will be based on the type of cells affected and how fast it is growing and spreading.

CAUSES

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is a cancer that starts in lymphocytes. The cause of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is not known. It is thought that viruses cause certain types of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. But this is less common. The risk of getting this cancer increases if:

- Your immune system (body's defense system) is weak, especially after an organ transplant.
- You are an elderly white male.
- You have a diet high in fat.
- You are infected with certain viruses.

SYMPTOMS

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma can occur at any age. It can cause different symptoms such as:

- Swelling of the lymph nodes
- Fever
- Excessive sweating
- Itchy skin
- Tiredness
- Weight loss
- Coughing, breathing trouble, and chest pain.
- Weakness and tiredness that do not go away.
- Pain, swelling. or a feeling of fullness in the abdomen.

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver will examine you to check your general health and look for any lumps. Blood tests and *biopsy* (removing body tissue for testing) of the lymph *node* (gland) may be included. Your caregiver may suggest chest x-ray, scanning or lumbar puncture (collecting fluid from spinal column for testing).

TREATMENT

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma can be treated in different ways. This depends on your symptoms, the stage of your cancer when you were first diagnosed, and the speed with which it is spreading. You and your caregiver will work together and decide on the best plan. Treatment may include:

- *Radiation therapy* (using radiation to destroy the cancer cells).
- *Chemotherapy* (using drugs to destroy the cancer cells).
- *Biological therapy* (using body's immune system to treat cancer) like *monoclonal antibody therapy* (using antibodies that can kill or block the cancer cells).
- Newer types of treatment are vaccine therapy and high-dose chemotherapy with stem cell (a type of cell) transplant (introducing healthy stem cells into the body). However, these are still under development.

You may remain symptom-free for 1-2 years, after treatment. Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma may recur. If it recurs, your caregiver will advise you on the suitable treatment.

If you are pregnant and also have non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, you need immediate treatment. Your caregiver will decide the treatment that suits you the most.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop new symptoms of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

- You have non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and continuous fever.

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