

# Chronic Leukaemia

## What is chronic leukaemia?

Chronic leukaemia develops when your white cells grow out of control. The abnormal white cells live too long, so there are too many circulating in the blood. As the white cells are not fully developed, they do not carry out the normal work of white cells.

The bone marrow becomes crowded with abnormal white cells, leaving little room for healthy red cells and platelets to be produced.

## Types of chronic leukaemia

There are two types of chronic leukaemia depending on what type of white blood cell is involved:

- chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL)
- chronic myeloid leukaemia (CML).

CLL is a leukaemia affecting the lymphocytes, which are a type of white blood cell. It is also sometimes known as chronic lymphatic leukaemia.

CML is a leukaemia affecting the granulocytes. They are part of myeloid family of white blood cells. CML is sometimes called chronic granulocytic leukaemia.

## What causes chronic leukaemia?

The cause of CLL is not known but research is trying to find out why it develops.

Most people diagnosed with CML have an abnormal chromosome called the Philadelphia chromosome. Chromosomes contain genes, which are the full set of instructions for growth and development. CML, like other forms of leukaemia, does not run in families.

CML has also been linked to exposure to high levels of radiation, such as being a survivor of an atomic bomb explosion.

## How common is it?

Nearly half of new cases of leukaemia are chronic leukaemia.

CLL is more common among people over 60 years of age and is rare in people under 40.

CML can occur at any age, but is more common after 60. It is rare in children.

For more detailed information consult the booklet *Understanding chronic leukaemia* on [www.cancertas.org.au/pages/healthprof\\_patient.php](http://www.cancertas.org.au/pages/healthprof_patient.php)

**Call The Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20**