

Lymphoma

Lymphomas are a group of diseases primarily involving the lymph glands. As the liver and spleen are closely related to the lymphatic system, they may also be affected. The same applies to the bone marrow and blood system. The cause is unknown and there are no welldefined risk factors for its development.

Lymphomas can be divided into so-called Hodgkin's disease, which occurs more commonly in younger patients and has a fairly predictable pattern of spread; and Non-Hodgkin's lymphomas, which occur more commonly in older people (more than two thirds being over the age of 60 years) and with a less predictable pattern of spread.

Non-Hodgkin's lymphomas can be subdivided into so-called indolent and aggressive lymphomas. Whereas the indolent forms have long survivals even without any treatment, they respond less well to treatment when far advanced, whilst the more aggressive ones respond better to treatment even in more advanced cases.

Lymphomas are generally discovered when a group of lymph nodes enlarge; the disease may also present with associated blood disorders and on closer examination enlarged nodes may then be discovered.

To establish a diagnosis and to determine the extent of disease the following investigations are useful:

- A biopsy of an enlarged lymph node
- Chest X-ray and/or CT scans of the chest, abdomen and pelvis
- Bone marrow examination
- Blood analysis

Your doctor may require further investigations depending on your symptoms at presentation.

Treatment options

Treatment will depend on the nature and extent of the disease as well as on your general state of health.

Surgery usually has no role other than the diagnostic information gathered through such intervention.

Radiation and chemotherapy are the two modalities mostly used, often in combination with one another. The role of radiation is limited to earlier stages of the disease and as consolidation therapy after intensive chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is most often used in the more advanced stages of lymphomas, but in certain instances it can give similar results to radiation in early disease. High dose chemotherapy with bone marrow transplant is the treatment of choice in a selected group of patients if first line chemotherapy fails.

The foregoing information is quite generalized. The specifics of your disease and treatment should be discussed with your oncologist to establish the optimal treatment plan for you as an individual.