

Patient information: Hodgkin lymphoma in children (The Basics)

Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate

What is Hodgkin lymphoma? — Hodgkin lymphoma is a type of lymphoma. Lymphoma is a cancer of the lymphatic system. The lymphatic system is made up of organs all over the body that make and store cells that fight infection ([figure 1](#)). Infection-fighting cells are also called "white blood cells."

When children have lymphoma, their white blood cells become abnormal, grow out of control, and travel to different parts of the body. The abnormal cells often collect in bean-shaped organs called lymph nodes. This makes the lymph nodes swell.

Hodgkin lymphoma happens more often in teens than in younger children.

What are the symptoms of Hodgkin lymphoma? — You might see or feel a swollen, painless lymph node under your child's skin. Swollen lymph nodes are usually in the neck, above the collar bone, or in the armpit or groin.

Lymph nodes deeper in the body can also become swollen and cause symptoms. For example, swollen lymph nodes in the chest can cause a cough, trouble swallowing, or trouble breathing.

Other symptoms of Hodgkin lymphoma can include:

- Feeling very tired
- Fever
- Weight loss or loss of appetite
- Night sweats that soak the clothes

Is there a test for Hodgkin lymphoma? — Yes. The doctor or nurse will ask about your child's symptoms and do an exam. He or she will also do:

- Blood tests
- A lymph node biopsy – For this test, a doctor removes one of the swollen lymph nodes. Then another doctor looks at the sample under a microscope to check for cancer cells.

What is lymphoma staging? — Lymphoma staging is a way in which doctors find out how far the lymphoma has spread in the lymphatic system or in the body.

Hodgkin lymphoma usually starts in lymph nodes in the neck or chest. If the cancer spreads, it usually spreads to nearby lymph nodes, and then to organs such as the spleen or liver.

To check how far your child's Hodgkin lymphoma has spread, the doctor will do an exam, blood tests, and imaging tests. Imaging tests, such as CT and PET scans, create pictures of the inside of the body.

The doctor might also do a bone marrow biopsy. For this test, a doctor takes a small sample of bone marrow (the tissue in the middle of your child's bones). Then another doctor looks at the sample under a microscope to check for cancer cells.

The right treatment for your child will depend a lot on the stage of his or her Hodgkin lymphoma.

How is Hodgkin lymphoma treated? — Treatment can include:

- Chemotherapy – Chemotherapy is the term doctors use to describe a group of medicines that kill cancer cells.

Doctors use different chemotherapy medicines to treat Hodgkin lymphoma. The doctor will work with you and your child to choose the ones that are right for your child.

- Radiation therapy – Radiation kills cancer cells.

In most cases, Hodgkin lymphoma can be cured with treatment.

What happens after treatment? — After treatment, the doctor will check your child every so often to see if the Hodgkin lymphoma comes back. Follow-ups can include talking with the doctor, exams, blood tests, and imaging tests.

You should also watch your child for the symptoms listed above. Having those symptoms could mean the lymphoma has come back. Tell the doctor or nurse if your child has any symptoms.

What happens if the Hodgkin lymphoma comes back? — If the lymphoma comes back, your child might have more chemotherapy, radiation, or a bone marrow transplant. In a bone marrow transplant, the doctor replaces cells in the bone marrow that are killed by chemotherapy or radiation. This is also called a "stem cell transplant."

What else should my child and I know about treatment? — Some treatments for Hodgkin lymphoma can cause certain medical problems in the future.

Talk with your child's doctor about these problems, so that you know what to watch for. Your child should also be seen regularly by a doctor who will check him or her for these problems later on.

What else should I do? — It's important to follow all of the doctor's instructions about visits and tests. It's also important to let the doctor know if your child has any side effects or problems during treatment.

Hodgkin lymphoma treatment can involve making many choices, such as what treatment your child should have and when.

Always let the doctors and nurses know how you feel about a treatment. Any time your child is offered a treatment, ask:

- What are the benefits of this treatment? Is it likely to help my child live longer? Will it reduce or prevent symptoms?
- What are the downsides to this treatment?
- Are there other options besides this treatment?
- What happens if my child does not have this treatment?

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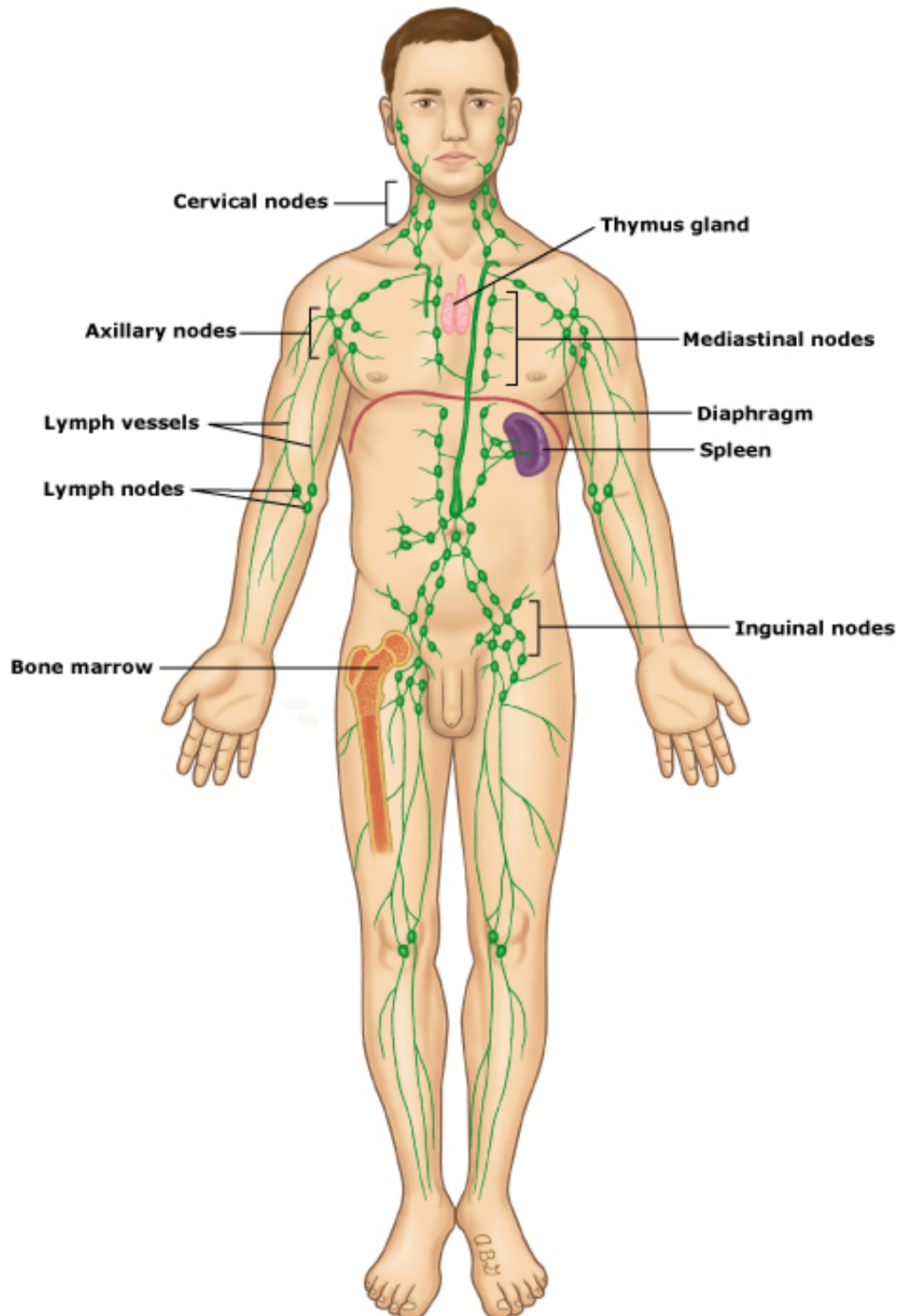
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GRAPHICS

Lymphatic system



This figure shows the organs of the lymphatic system, which include the bone marrow, thymus, spleen, and lymph nodes. These organs are connected by lymph vessels.

Graphic 63854 Version 4.0