

What is lymphoma?

Lymphoma is a type of blood cancer. It is the 5th most common type of cancer in the UK. Lymphoma develops when white blood cells called **lymphocytes** grow out of control.

We have separate information about the possible **causes and risk factors for lymphoma**.

On this page

What is lymphoma?

How cancer develops

Information and support

We have separate information about the topics in **bold font**. Please get in touch if you'd like to request copies or if you would like further information about any aspect of lymphoma. Phone 0808 808 5555 or email information@lymphoma-action.org.uk.

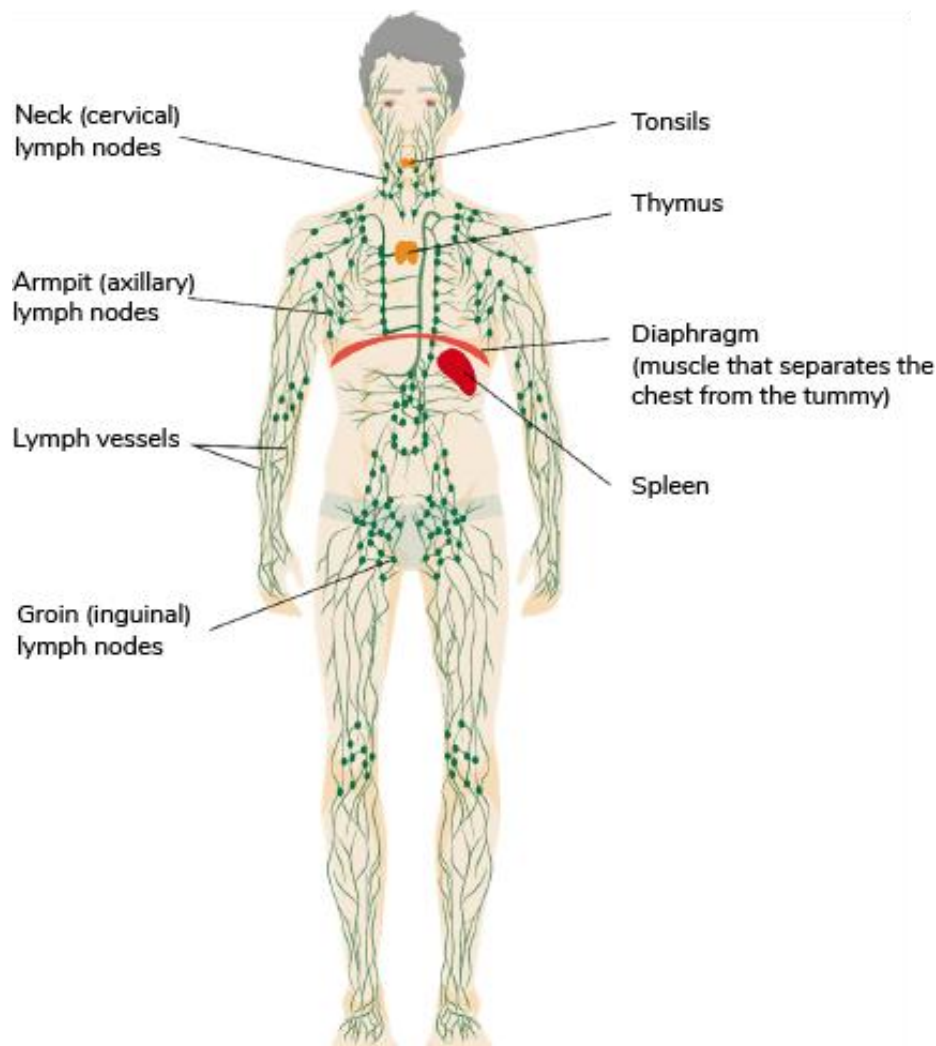
What is lymphoma?

Lymphoma is the fifth most common type of cancer in the UK. It can develop at any age.

Watch our animation explaining what lymphoma is, how it develops and treatments available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z9sdEnwduQ>. This animation is also available in **Polish**, **Punjabi** and **Romanian**.

Lymphoma is a type of blood cancer. It develops when a type of white blood cell, called **lymphocytes**, grow out of control. Lymphocytes are part of your **immune system**, which helps to fight infection. Lymphocytes travel around your body in the **lymphatic system** which contains a fluid called **lymph**. The lymph fluid passes

through glands (**lymph nodes**), which are spread throughout your body. For this reason, lymphoma might also be referred to as a cancer of the immune system.

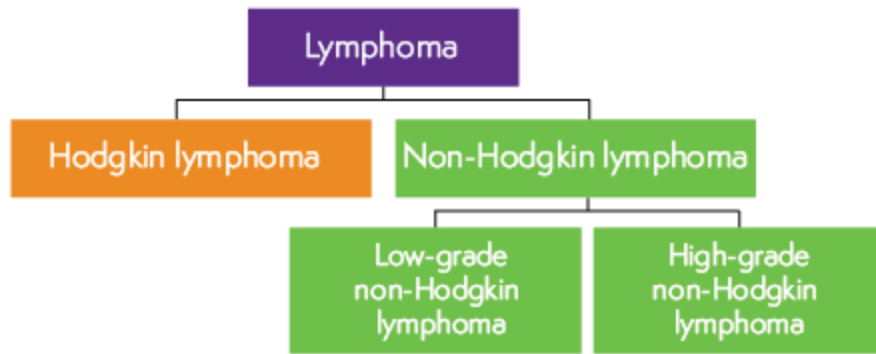


The lymphatic system. Lymph vessels and lymph nodes are shown in green.

If you have lymphoma, your lymphocytes **divide in an abnormal way** or do not die when they should. The abnormal lymphocytes build up. This can be in almost any part of your body, but is often felt in your armpits, neck or groin.

The **symptoms of lymphoma** depend on where the lymphoma starts, what parts of your body it affects, and what **type of lymphoma** it is.

There are over 60 different types of lymphoma, broadly grouped into **Hodgkin lymphomas** and **non-Hodgkin lymphomas**. Non-Hodgkin lymphomas are further grouped depending on whether they are slow-growing (described as '**low-grade**' or 'indolent') or fast-growing ('**high-grade**' or 'aggressive'). Different types of lymphoma behave differently and need different **treatment**.



The main types of lymphoma

Watch Professor Andy Davies give an overview of what lymphoma is and how it develops here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eqfP67R9A7Y>

We also have a video by Dr Rob Lown, who gives a more detailed introduction to lymphoma: <https://youtu.be/Nm4ejflha9s>.

Other types of blood cancer

Lymphoma, leukaemia and myeloma are all types of blood cancer (also known as 'haematological' cancers). Although there are similarities between some types of lymphoma and leukaemia, most types develop differently. They also require different treatment.

If you would like information or support in relation to other types of blood cancers, you might be interested in our useful organisations listing, which includes [blood cancer organisations](#).

How cancer develops

Our bodies are made up of cells. You might think of these as tiny building blocks.

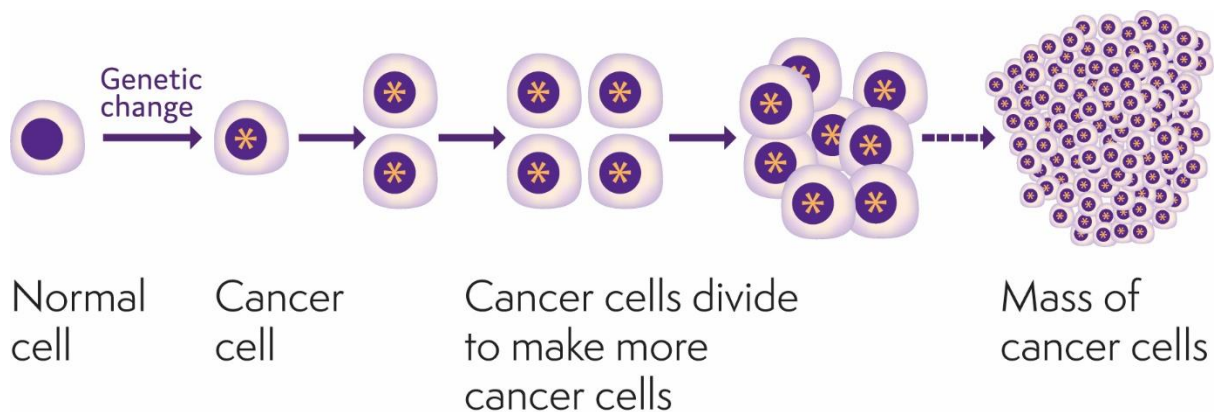
Each day, cells grow and divide to make new cells, replacing old cells that die off naturally. This balance of cell division and cell loss is carefully controlled by chemical signals so that we only make the number of new cells our body needs.

Cancer develops when a mistake (mutation) happens during cell division. This changes the genetic code (DNA) inside a cell. Most of the time, these changes are harmless. However, they can sometimes disrupt important processes within our

cells. This can create abnormal cells that stop 'listening' to the chemical signals that control cell division. The cells can then:

- divide and multiply when they shouldn't
- keep dividing when they should stop
- stay alive when they should die.

When this happens, a group of cells can form that divide faster than they die, leading to a build-up of abnormal cells (cancer). It usually takes a number of different mutations for a cancer to develop.



How cancer develops

Once cancer develops, the abnormal cells might stop your body from making normal, healthy cells. This can prevent organs in your body from working properly. The abnormal cells might spread to other parts of the body and start growing there too. Cancer also uses the energy and nutrients your body needs.

There are lots of different types of cancer depending on what type of cell became abnormal. Different types of cancer can cause different symptoms and effects, depending on where the cancer is and how fast it is growing.

Information and support

If you, or someone you know, has been diagnosed with [lymphoma](#), we're here for you. We have a range of [support services](#) and [information you can trust](#).

References

The full list of references for this page is available on our website. Alternatively, email publications@lymphoma-action.org.uk or call 01296 619409 if you would like a copy.

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All our information is available without charge. If you have found it useful and would like to make a donation to support our work you can do so on our website lymphoma-action.org.uk/Donate. Our information could not be produced without support from people like you. Thank you.

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