

Cutaneous T-cell lymphoma (CTCL) ^{1,2}

About CTCL

CTCL, a form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, is a rare type of cancer that affects a certain type of white blood cell known as T-lymphocytes, or T-cells. Normal T-cells function by regulating the body's immune system in its job of fighting infections and foreign substances. In CTCL, the malignant T-cells are drawn to the skin, where some are deposited. In advanced stages of the disease, CTCL can also affect the blood, lymph nodes and other internal organs.

Mycosis fungoides is the most common type of CTCL. In mycosis fungoides, T-cell lymphocytes become malignant and affect the skin. In rare cases mycosis fungoides may progress to Sézary syndrome. With Sézary syndrome, malignant T-cells affect the skin as well as the blood. Not all cases of mycosis fungoides advance to Sézary syndrome.

Symptoms

- Most cases of CTCL start with dry skin, a red rash, and itching. For some people, the initial sign is skin redness, or dark patches resembling psoriasis or eczema.
- The patches typically progress and become thickened with bumps that are referred to as plaques. Sometimes there are larger, raised bumps or tumours.
- In later stages of the disease, the skin tumours may develop ulcers that lead to infections.

Diagnosis

- A diagnosis of CTCL is often suggested by its visible manifestations; however, it is always confirmed by skin biopsy.
- The initial changes to the skin may be similar to several other non-cancerous skin conditions such as eczema, psoriasis or allergies, but dermatologists and oncologists are working together to improve the diagnostic process of skin lymphoma cells.

Prognosis

- There is no cure for CTCL but with appropriate treatment, patients can live relatively normal lives without serious, health-compromising complications and some are able to remain in remission for long periods of time.
- As with many cancers, the prognosis for patients diagnosed with CTCL is closely linked to the stage of their disease. In general, CTCL has a slow progression so many patients are diagnosed at an early stage (Stage I and Stage II).
- The median survival for patients with CTCL can vary from more than 20 years for patients with Stage I disease, to less than five years for patients with advanced disease (Stage III to IV).

For more information, please contact:

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¹ Cutaneous Lymphoma Foundation *CTCL-MF Fast Facts* Available at:

http://www.clfoundation.org/about_cutaneous_lymphoma/CL_fast_facts.pdf Accessed August 20, 2009.

² The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. *Facts: Cutaneous T-Cell Lymphoma*. Available at:

http://www.leukemia-lymphoma.org/attachments/National/br_1163608564.pdf Accessed August 20, 2009.