Leukaemia is cancer of the white blood cells, and is classified according to which cells are affected. Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL) is a cancer of white blood cells known as lymphocytes. These cells are important in fighting infection and other diseases.

In ALL, too many immature white blood cells known as lymphoblasts are produced.

Tests used to make this diagnosis may include looking at specific proteins expressed on the cancer cells (immunophenotyping) or looking at changes in chromosomes (cytogenetics).

Infections — immature lymphoblasts are less effective at fighting infections than mature lymphocytes, so ALL sufferers may find an increase in the length or number of infections they experience. Weight loss — the extra stress your body is under and a general feeling of poor health can contribute to weight loss. Enlarged lymph nodes — these may be in the neck but also the armpit or groin.

WHO’S AFFECTED?

ALL is more common in men but also affects children and women.

Adult ALL is rare and progresses rapidly.

Adult patients diagnosed with Ph-positive ALL are also particularly young, with a median age of diagnosis of 34–39.

Many adult ALL sufferers relapse and the median survival rate for those who do is only 3–5 months.

RISK FACTORS FOR LEUKAEMIA INCLUDE:

- **Immunotherapies**
- **Genetic conditions**
- **Weakened immunity**

You may be at higher risk of developing ALL if:

- You have HIV.
- You take immunosuppressants after an organ transplant.
- You have a weakened immune system due to HIV or taking immunosuppressants after an organ transplant may be at higher risk.

IMMUNOTHERAPY

aims to harness parts of the body’s natural immune system to help fight cancer.

Treatments available for ALL include cytotoxic chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy.