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Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma

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Signs and symptoms of non-Hodgkin lymphoma

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma can cause many different signs and symptoms, depending on where it is in the body. In some cases it might not cause any symptoms until it grows quite large. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Swollen abdomen (belly)
- Feeling full after only a small amount of food
- Chest pain or pressure
- Shortness of breath or cough
- Fever
- Weight loss

- Night sweats
- Fatigue (extreme tiredness)
- Low red blood cell counts (anemia)

Swollen lymph nodes

Non-Hodgkin lymphoma can cause lymph nodes to become enlarged. When this occurs in lymph nodes close to the surface of the body (such as on the sides of the neck, in the groin or underarm areas, or above the collar bone), they may be seen or felt as lumps under the skin. These are often found by the patient, a family member, or a health care professional. Although enlarged lymph nodes are a common symptom of lymphoma, they are much more often caused by infections.

Lymphoma in the abdomen

Lymphomas in the abdomen can cause it to become swollen and tender. This could be because of lymph nodes in the abdomen enlarging, but it can also be caused by the build-up of large amounts of fluid.

Lymphoma can enlarge the spleen so that it presses on the stomach. This can make a person feel full after eating only a small amount of food.

When lymphoma is in the intestines or causes swelling near the intestines, bowel movements may be blocked, which may lead to abdominal pain, nausea, or vomiting. Lymphoma in the intestines can also cause holes to develop in the intestine wall (called *perforations*). This allows the contents of the intestines to leak out into the abdominal cavity, leading to serious infection and severe pain with nausea and vomiting.

Lymphomas of the stomach often cause stomach pain, nausea, and reduced appetite.

Lymphoma in the chest

When lymphoma starts in the thymus or lymph nodes in the chest, it may press on the nearby trachea (windpipe), which can cause coughing or trouble breathing. Lymphomas in this area can also cause a feeling of chest pain or pressure.

The superior vena cava (SVC) is the large vein that carries blood from the head and arms back to the heart. It passes near the thymus and lymph nodes inside the chest. Lymphomas in this area may push on the SVC, which can cause the blood to back up in the veins. This can lead to swelling (and sometimes a bluish-red color) in the head, arms, and upper chest. It can also cause trouble breathing and a change in consciousness if it affects the brain. This condition, known as *SVC syndrome*, can be life-threatening and must be treated right away.

Lymphoma affecting the brain

Lymphomas of the brain, called *primary brain lymphomas*, can cause headache, trouble thinking, weakness in parts of the body, personality changes, and sometimes seizures.

Other types of lymphoma can spread to the area around the brain and spinal cord. This can cause problems such as double vision, facial numbness, and trouble speaking.

Lymphoma in the skin

Lymphomas of the skin may be seen or felt. They often appear as extremely itchy, red or purple lumps or nodules under the skin. (For more details, see our document [Lymphoma of the Skin.](#))

General symptoms

B symptoms

Along with causing symptoms and signs in the part of the body where it starts, non-Hodgkin lymphoma can also cause general symptoms, such as:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Fever
- Drenching night sweats (enough to soak clothing and sheets)

When talking about lymphoma, doctors call these *B symptoms*. B symptoms are most common in more rapidly growing lymphomas. These symptoms are important not only in helping diagnose non-Hodgkin lymphoma, but also in determining the stage and prognosis (outlook) if lymphoma is found (see "[How is non-Hodgkin lymphoma staged?](#)").

Symptoms caused by low blood cell counts

If lymphoma cells are in the bone marrow they can crowd out the normal, healthy cells that make new blood cells. This can lead to problems like:

- Severe or frequent infections (from low white blood cell counts)
- Easy bruising or bleeding (from low blood platelet counts)
- Fatigue (from low red blood cell counts: anemia)

Anemia can also occur if the lymphoma cells cause the body to destroy red blood cells (this is called *hemolytic anemia*).

Many symptoms of lymphoma can be caused by things other than cancer. Still, if you are having symptoms, you should see your doctor so the cause can be found.

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