

Leukemia & Lymphoma

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Feeling Sick With CML: Coping With Later Phases

By Jennifer Clopton

WebMD Feature

Reviewed by Sujana Movva, MD

When you're in the advanced stages of CML, you may feel sick and have a wide range of symptoms -- or none at all. Here's what's going on inside your body and how to feel as good as possible.

How Do You Know Your CML Has Progressed?

You might feel ill, but not necessarily.

Some people with advanced CML have fever, less appetite, or [weight loss](#). But not everyone does. You might not have any symptoms and find out through [blood](#) tests that your CML has progressed.

That's why regular doctor visits are key.

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"With chronic disease, be religious about monitoring, so if you were to slip into the accelerated phase you can catch it quickly," says Jerald P. Radich, MD, of Seattle's Fred Hutchinson [Cancer](#) Research Center.

Why Does CML Progress?

For most people with CML, [medications](#) prevent the disease from advancing to its later stages.

But it can still happen. About 10% to 15% of CML patients reach the advanced stages of the disease, says Elias Jabbour, MD. He's a [leukemia](#) expert at the University of Texas MD Anderson [Cancer](#) Center in Houston.

It can happen if you don't take your meds, if your disease was already advanced when doctors found it, or if your body stops responding to the medication you're taking.

The Accelerated Phase

In this phase, abnormal [blood cells](#) and platelets (which help stop bleeding) begin to crowd out normal ones. Several gene glitches cause that, Radich says.

You can also progress to this phase if you develop very high or low platelet counts or high white blood cell counts that don't respond to treatment.

What Is CML Blast Crisis?

CML is in blast phase when blast cells -- another type of white blood cell -- make up more than 20% of your bone marrow or blood.

During this phase, infections and bleeding are common and can be life-threatening. Fever, loss of appetite, weight loss, and [fatigue](#) can worsen.

Treating Accelerated or Blast Phases

The goal of treatment in later phases is to replace all cells that have the BCR-[ABL](#) gene and return your disease to the chronic phase or put it into remission.

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