

# Let's talk about...

## Explaining Leukemia to Children

### What is Cancer?

Your body is made of billions of tiny building blocks called **cells**. You have different types for everything, like your brain, skin, hair, and blood. Usually, your body is an expert at growing new, healthy cells to keep you strong.

Cancer happens when some of these cells become “unhealthy.” Instead of following the body’s normal rules, these unhealthy cells start growing way too fast. When a bunch of these cells stick together in one spot, they form a lump called a **tumor**. Some tumors are easy to see or feel, while others stay hidden deep inside the body.

### What is Leukemia?

Leukemia is a type of cancer that affects the blood.

- **The Factory:** Blood cells are made inside your bones in a place called bone marrow. You can think of bone marrow as a “blood factory.”
- **The Problem:** In a person with leukemia, the factory starts making unhealthy cells. These unhealthy cells take up so much space that there isn’t enough room for the healthy ones to do their jobs.
- **Healthy Cells:** Red blood cells give you energy by carrying oxygen, white blood cells fight off germs, and platelets help stop bleeding by forming scabs. Plasma is the liquid that helps all these cells flow through your body.

For more information or to connect with a Child Life Specialist, please visit: <http://ucdavis.health/childlife>



Normal blood



Leukemia

### The 3 Cs of Cancer

It helps to remember three important facts about this illness:

- **Cancer:** It’s the name of the illness, but it is not like a cold or the flu. You can’t “catch” it from someone.
- **Contagious:** Cancer is **not** contagious. You can still hug, play with, and spend time with someone who has it without any risk of getting it yourself.
- **Cause:** You did **not** cause the illness. Nothing you said, did, or even thought made this happen. It is never a child’s fault.

### How Doctors Treat Cancer

Doctors use different “tools” to fight these unhealthy cells:

- **Chemotherapy (Chemo):** This is a very strong medicine designed to find and stop cancer cells. Sometimes, chemo accidentally affects healthy cells too, like the ones that grow hair. This is why people might lose their hair or feel very tired and sick during treatment.
- **Radiation:** This is an invisible beam of energy that targets the cancer cells. You can’t see it or feel it while it’s happening, but afterward, it can make a person feel exhausted or give them a “sunburn” feeling on their skin.