

## Understanding NICE guidance

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Information for people who use NHS services

# Fludarabine for chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

*NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.*

This leaflet is about when **fludarabine** should be used to treat people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL) in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people with CLL but it may also be useful for their families or carers or anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe CLL or the treatments in detail – your specialist should discuss these with you. Some sources of further information and support are on the back page.



*There are several possible treatments for CLL. Your healthcare team should talk to you about the treatment options available.*

### What has NICE said?

Fludarabine given on its own is not recommended as an initial treatment for people with chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL).

Fludarabine is not licensed to be prescribed for CLL in combination with other chemotherapy medicines. This is because its 'marketing authorisation', which is normally needed before a drug can be prescribed, did not cover combination treatment. NICE was therefore unable to look at fludarabine in combination with other chemotherapy drugs for people with CLL. The process of giving a drug its marketing authorisation is not related to the NICE appraisal process and it is not carried out by NICE. You can find out more from the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA; [www.mhra.gov.uk](http://www.mhra.gov.uk)).

## Chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

CLL is the most common form of leukaemia and is caused by a build-up of cancerous white blood cells (lymphocytes). They multiply in the blood and stop the red blood cells, normal white blood cells and platelets (blood fragments that have a role in the clotting of blood) from working properly. This can cause bruising or bleeding, anaemia and breathlessness (because of fewer red cells in the blood). Normal white blood cells help the body fight infection but the cancerous white blood cells are not able to do this. Because of this, people with CLL are more likely to pick up infections.

## Fludarabine

Fludarabine is a chemotherapy drug. It works by stopping cancer cells from multiplying which slows down the progress of CLL.

### What does this mean for me?

NICE looks at how well treatments work and also at how well they work in relation to how much they cost the NHS.

There was evidence that fludarabine given on its own as an initial treatment for people with CLL would not represent value for money. This means that for the time being it should not be prescribed routinely on the NHS. Your doctor should talk to you about other treatment options available to you.

## More information about chronic lymphocytic leukaemia

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with CLL. Please note that NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Cancerbackup, 0808 800 1234  
[www.cancerbackup.org.uk](http://www.cancerbackup.org.uk)
- Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia (CLL) Support Association  
0800 977 4396  
[www.cllsupport.org.uk](http://www.cllsupport.org.uk)
- Macmillan Cancer Support, 0808 808 2020  
[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- CHILDREN with LEUKAEMIA, 020 7404 0808  
[www.leukaemia.org](http://www.leukaemia.org)
- Leukaemia CARE, 0800 169 6680, 0808 801 0444  
[www.leukaemiacare.org.uk](http://www.leukaemiacare.org.uk)

NHS Direct online ([www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)) may be a good starting point for finding out more. Your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to give you further advice and support.

### About NICE

NICE produces advice (guidance) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating different medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider all the research on the disease or treatment, talk to people affected by it, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

*To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see [www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance)*

*This leaflet and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at [www.nice.org.uk/TA119](http://www.nice.org.uk/TA119)*

*You can order printed copies of this leaflet from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference N1204).*