

# 9 Lymphoma Symptoms to Watch For, According to Cancer Doctors

The signs are often vague and non-specific, so never assume you have this type of cancer based on symptoms alone.



By [Barbara Brody](#)

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Many [types of cancer](#) don't cause any noticeable symptoms, at least not in the earliest stages. That's often the case for people with lymphoma, provided they have the low-grade (slow-growing) variety.

But even low-grade lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system, sometimes causes problems. It can progress, becoming a more aggressive type of lymphoma within five to 10 years, according to [Cedars-Sinai](#). At that point, symptoms are much more likely to become apparent or increasingly bothersome.

## What are the symptoms of lymphoma?

[Lymphoma](#) symptoms can vary from person to person, so not everyone experiences the same issues. You should also know that many symptoms associated with lymphoma can be vague or caused by different, unrelated ailments, so you shouldn't assume that having one of them means you have lymphoma.

Still, it's wise to be aware of the following possible lymphoma symptoms and let your doctor know if you're having any of them.

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## Swollen lymph nodes

Lymphoma primarily impacts the lymphocytes. These are a special type of white blood cells made in your bone marrow as well as in your lymph nodes, according

to the [Cleveland Clinic](#). Lymphocytes mostly hang out in the lymph nodes, including those that reside in your neck, groin, and armpit. Your spleen, which is located below your left rib cage, is also home to many lymphocytes.

When healthy people catch an infection, the lymph glands recruit more immune cells to help them fight off the invader; that's why they might swell up and feel tender when you're coming down with a cold, says Felipe Samaniego, MD, Professor in the Department of Lymphoma/Myeloma, Division of Cancer Medicine at The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center.

In people with lymphoma, however, the lymph nodes may become enlarged because they're filled with an abundance of cancerous cells, Cleveland Clinic explains. Your spleen might become enlarged for the same reason.

Nodes that swell up due to lymphoma usually aren't as painful as they are when you're coming down with an infection, says [Lymphoma Action](#), though some cancer patients notice an ache.

## **Fever and/or chills**

Fever is another sign that your body's immune system is being activated, says Gary Schiller, MD, professor of hematology/oncology and director of the UCLA Hematological Malignancies/Stem Cell Transplant Unit. This mechanism can be activated because you've caught an infection that your body needs to fight off, or it can be set into gear by cancer such as lymphoma.

If you're getting fevers for no apparent reason, be sure to tell your doctor so they can investigate and determine the root cause.

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## **Night sweats**

You might be waking up drenched for any number of reasons, such as hormonal changes related to menopause or an [autoimmune disease](#). But some lymphoma patients also experience [night sweats](#), according to the [Dana-Farber Cancer](#)

[Institute](#). This symptom suggests that you might be spiking fevers at night or otherwise having problems regulating your body temperature.

## **Loss of appetite**

Not feeling hungry or getting full very quickly is another possible sign of lymphoma. Some patients also feel nauseated, vomit, or develop abdominal pain. The reason, according to the [American Cancer Society](#), ties back to spleen: If it's become enlarged with cancerous lymphocytes, it can press on your stomach and make you uncomfortable.

## **Persistent, overwhelming fatigue**

Feeling really, really tired all the time is another possible lymphoma symptom, albeit a vague one because so many other problems could be making you feel wiped. For people with lymphoma, the [Lymphoma Research Foundation](#) notes that exhaustion often stems from anemia, or a lack of red blood cells that carry oxygen throughout your body. Because lymphoma patients overproduce cancerous lymphocytes, there's less room in the bone marrow to produce other healthy cells including red blood cells.

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## **Easy bruising or bleeding**

This is another problem that's related to lack of production of healthy cells. People with lymphoma might not make enough platelets, which help your blood clot, according to [Lymphoma Action](#). If you're getting black-and-blue more easily than you used to or you're having trouble stopping the bleeding whenever you nick yourself, consider it a possible warning sign.

## **Coughing, chest pressure, or shortness of breath**

Sometimes lymphomas start in the thymus gland, another part of your immune system that's located in the chest. If this gland or other lymph nodes in your chest

swell up, they might press on the windpipe and lead to coughing, [chest pain](#), or chest pressure, per the [American Cancer Society](#).

Note: Anytime you have serious trouble breathing—whether it's due to lymphoma or not—consider it a medical emergency and get help right away.

**RELATED:** [What Are Night Sweats—And What Causes Them? Here's What Experts Say](#)

## Unexplained weight loss

If you've struggled to shed unwanted weight in the past, losing weight without trying might seem like cause for celebration. But the truth is that dropping a significant amount of weight (about 10% of your starting body weight or more over six months) without making any changes to your usual pattern of eating and exercise is a red flag that something is amiss.

The [American Cancer Society](#) explains that this sometimes happens because cancer cells—which grow far more quickly than normal cells—use up more energy (calories) than healthy cells.

## Itchy skin

Dry skin and allergies often make people itchy, so it's usually nothing to be alarmed about. But if you've recently started feeling unusually itchy—especially in your hands, legs, or feet—it might be related to lymphoma. Some people with lymphoma also develop a visible rash, but that's not always the case, per [Moffitt Cancer Center](#).

Experts think the relentless itchiness is due to immune system releasing chemicals (cytokines) that can irritate nerve endings in the skin, Moffitt Cancer Center reports.

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