



FYI Immune System

Here's a look at the different types of white blood cells found in your immune system!

Neutrophils: The most common white blood cells, neutrophils are sort of like early responders to bacterial infection. They're on the scene less than an hour after tissue becomes injured or inflamed. When a whole bunch of them gang up on bacteria, they form the thick white goo called pus.

Lymphocytes: There are several types of lymphocytes. "Natural Killer," or NK cells distinguish healthy cells from unhealthy cells, and then release toxins that kill the unhealthy ones. B cells kill invaders by releasing antibodies. And different T cells have different jobs. Some secrete proteins called cytokines; others destroy infected cells; and some hang around in the bloodstream for a long time, protecting you in case a particular invader tries to come back.

Macrophages: When white blood cells leave the bloodstream and enter bodily tissues, they are called macrophages. Macrophages are pretty big (hence the prefix "macro-", which means "large"), and they engulf and digest bacteria and viruses. They also help "helper" T cells identify different antigens. Macrophages begin life as blood cells called **monocytes**.

Basophils: These release a chemical called histamine, which causes inflammation. When they do this because an antigen is in the body, it's great. But they sometimes release histamine in response to harmless substances. This is called an allergic reaction.

Eosinophils: These cells protect the body against parasites. But they're also involved in the types of inflammation that occur during allergic reactions and asthma attacks.

