



## Meet Marco!

This three-year-old rides his bike, dances, plays hide-and-seek, reads books, goes for walks, rides in his wagon, and colors and paints like any other child his age. He is the biggest cheerleader for his two older brothers and sister. He loves to cuddle. He shows compassion to his “friends” or, in other words, his outrageous collection of stuffed animals. He enjoys acting as their doctor, fixing them and ensuring them that “everything will be fine.” Most importantly, Marco loves to fly around in his cape and catch the “bad guys.” He is certainly stronger than any superhero and has recently found himself a new name: Mighty Marco.

Unfortunately, this energetic and happy toddler finds himself battling the ultimate bade guy these days. The one who has come into many of our families and shaken us to the core: Cancer.

Just short of Marco’s third birthday, he was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. This is a life threatening childhood cancer that requires intensive chemotherapy treatment, both inpatient and outpatient, t the Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh. Marco is a high-risk patient due to the severity of the Leukemia when initially diagnosed; all of his bones were entirely filled with cancer cells. He was so anemic that they immediately began blood transfusions that lasted for three consecutive days before he could even begin to fight back. Marco is also classified as CNS 2 (Central Nervous System 2), so not only is the cancer in his bones, but it was also found in his spine and brain, requiring regular sedations and intrathecal chemotherapy i.e. injections directly into his spinal column and cerebral fluid.

Marco’s oncology team created a treatment plan to help get him into remission, stating the first year of treatment is the most critical. During his treatment, Marco’s immune system has been severely compromised to the point that he is not allowed to attend any childcare/ preschool or any public place that could potentially increase his risk of infection. Unfortunately, delays are anticipated and likely to occur throughout his treatment plan due to fevers, common colds, and other illnesses. Treatments will last at least three and a half years, consisting of a combination of outpatient visits to the clinic at the children’s hospital of Pittsburgh and inpatient admissions. This situation is one no family could have ever imagined, let alone hae been prepared for.

Although Marco knows more about his procedures than he should , his spirit remains intact. He still happily walks down the hall with a larger-than-life smile on his face, knowing he is about to be poked, prodded and filled with medicine that is going to make him physically feel terrible.