

Neutropenia and Low White Blood Cell Precautions

A neutrophil is a type of white blood cell found in the bloodstream that helps your body fight infection. White blood cells (WBC) play an important part in fighting infection. When your WBC count falls below normal, you are more at risk of infection. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy can make your WBC count drop below normal.

Neutropenia means the number of neutrophils in the bloodstream are below normal. Think of the neutrophil as a bodyguard. When you have fewer bodyguards around to protect you, you can get sick easily because your defenses are reduced.

Chemotherapy is one of the most common causes of neutropenia since it can potentially impair the production of neutrophils.

Infection

It is important to know when your neutrophil count is low. You should take your temperature when you feel unwell or if you have signs or symptoms of a possible infection.

If you have a temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or greater, contact your doctor right away or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Room. Do not take any medicines to lower your temperature unless directed by your doctor. This may hide a worsening infection.

Possible Signs of Infection

If you have the following signs and symptoms, then you may have an infection:

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) for more than 1 hour
- Chills – with or without fever
- Body aches
- Extreme fatigue (tiredness)
- Sore throat or mouth sores
- Runny nose
- Cough that is new or worsens
- Shortness of breath
- Pain in the abdomen or rectum
- Diarrhea

- Vomiting
- Burning or pain with urination
- Unusual vaginal discharge or irritation
- Stiff neck
- Changes in mental status
- Redness, swelling or tenderness in any area including around your catheter site

Protect yourself

Follow these instructions to help protect yourself from infection. You may already do most of these, but they are especially important if you are receiving chemotherapy or radiation therapy, or if your doctor thinks you may have neutropenia.

- Keep Clean
 - I. Wash your hands often. Especially before eating, after using the restroom and after touching doorknobs and handrails. Persons coming in contact with you should clean their hands too.
 - II. Shower daily with lukewarm water. Check your skin frequently for any cuts, rashes, redness, swelling, itching, or drainage.
 - III. Clean your teeth and gums using a soft toothbrush. Inspect your mouth for any redness, white patches, bumps, or sores.
 - IV. Keep your fingernails and toes clean and cut short
- Protect Your Skin
 - I. Never walk barefoot.
 - II. Moisturize dry skin with creams, lotions or oils.
 - III. Wear gloves when washing dishes or cleaning with chemicals.
 - IV. Cover any scrapes with a bandage.
 - V. Use an electric shaver, not a razor.
 - VI. Limit sun exposure.
- Watch Your Diet
 - I. Clean and cook all foods completely.
 - II. Avoid eating raw fruits and vegetables. (Produce from a can or jar is usually safe since it has been processed.)
 - III. Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluids each day to help avoid constipation. You may use stool softeners or laxatives if needed

Patient Education



- What to Avoid: (*Please avoid the following people, places or activities to reduce your risk of infection*)
 - I. Large crowds (Do not go to concerts, movie theaters, sporting events or shopping malls.)
 - II. Anyone with signs of an infection, such as fever, cough or runny nose
 - III. People with shingles or chicken pox
 - IV. Gardening and Dirty Diapers
 - V. Pet litter boxes and pet waste
 - VI. Use a hospital mask to prevent exposure to airborne germs that cause respiratory infection. Have your air filters changed once a month by someone, do not do it yourself if you have a low white blood cell count. Wear a mask if you are in a room where dusting, vacuuming, or sweeping is going on.