

Neutropenia: When your neutrophils are very low

Neutrophils are white blood cells that fight bacterial infections. Neutropenia is usually a temporary condition caused by chemotherapy and/or radiation treatments. Your neutrophil count will reach its lowest point (nadir) about 7 – 14 days after chemotherapy. When your neutrophil count falls below a certain range you are at a higher risk for bacterial infections.

Call your doctor right away for:

- ✓ *Fever of 100.5 degrees F and above*
- ✓ *Chills*
- ✓ *Sweating*
- ✓ *Cough or shortness of breath*
- ✓ *Sore throat or mouth sores*
- ✓ *Redness or swelling on your skin*
- ✓ *Loose or liquid stools*
- ✓ *Trouble urinating – increased frequency or burning*
- ✓ *Vaginal drainage or itching*
- ✓ *Flu-like symptoms*
- ✓ *Sore IV, or Port site*

Things to do:

Frequent handwashing: at least 10 seconds; before and after the bathroom; and before eating.

Daily warm showers, pat skin dry.

Use skin moisturizers.

Only use an electric razor.

Good oral care, soft toothbrush.

Prevent constipation.

Clean rectal area well after bowel movements. Women should wipe from front to back, perianally.

For intercourse, use a water-soluble lubricant. Use good hygiene after intercourse. Intercourse should be avoided if severely neutropenic.

Use gloves for:
Changing diapers, housecleaning, gardening.

Protect skin from the sun.

Tell ALL your doctors that you may have low white blood cells.

Things to avoid:

Do not expose yourself to sick people.

Stay away from crowds or public places.

Do not get vaccinated without permission from your Oncologist.

Avoid contact with anyone who has recently had a live vaccine.

Do not handle pet feces or cat litter.

Do not use rectal thermometers, suppositories, douches, bath salts, tampons (use sanitary napkins).

Do not have dental work performed without permission from your oncologist.

Do not eat raw fish or undercooked meats, and do not eat at salad bars.

Do not use a hot tub or jacuzzi.

Do not have a manicure or pedicure.

Revised 2004, Life With Cancer®