

## ONCOLOGY

## After Chemotherapy Care Instructions

# Neutropenia

*What is neutropenia?*

Cancer or cancer therapy can cause neutropenia. Neutropenia is a decreased number of neutrophils in a person's blood. Neutrophils are white blood cells that help protect the body against infection by destroying bacteria. Neutropenia usually causes no symptoms. It increases the risk of infection of your skin and organs because your body cannot fight off germs as usual.

*What are the symptoms of neutropenia?*

Since neutropenia increases the risk of infection, look for these symptoms:

- If your temperature is greater than 101°F. orally or 100.4°F. or greater over 1 hour without an obvious infection.
- Chills or fever.
- Pain, swelling, warmth, or redness of your skin.
- Change in your skin color.
- Swollen lymph nodes in your neck, armpits, or groin.
- Shortness of breath.
- Pain with urination, or cloudy or strong odor to your urine.
- Any new pain or a change in your pain.

*What can I do at home to care for myself?*

- Eat a healthy, balanced diet. Eat high-fiber foods to help prevent constipation.
- Check your temperature for fever if you feel warm or have the chills.
- Use a soft toothbrush. Talk to your physician about other steps you can take to prevent infections in your mouth.
- Wash your hands with soap and water, especially before eating and after using the bathroom.
- For women, use sanitary napkins (pads) instead of tampons, and change frequently. Do not douche.
- Avoid rectal thermometers, suppositories, or enemas.

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*When should I call  
my physician?*

- Avoid tasks that might expose you to germs, such as disposing of pet feces or urine.
- Avoid crowds of people and anyone who might have an active infection or an illness such as a cold or the flu. You may also need to avoid people who have recently had certain kinds of vaccinations, such as MMR (measles-mumps-rubella), chicken pox, or any live vaccine.
- Take steps to prevent cuts, burns, and sunburns.
- Follow proper food handling and preparation. Make sure your food is:
  - Washed thoroughly,
  - Fully cooked, and
  - Wash and peel all fruits and vegetables well.
  
- If you have any symptoms described above.
- You have severe shortness of breath.
- You pass out (lose consciousness).
- You suddenly become weak and develop a fever.

If you cannot reach your health care team or your symptoms get worse, go to Urgent Care or the Emergency Department.