

## Neutropenia

### What is neutropenia?

Neutropenia means that a person has a low amount of neutrophils, a special white blood cell. White blood cells help your body fight infection. Chemotherapy or radiation therapy may cause neutropenia. Your risk of infection is higher if you have a low amount of white blood cells.

### What is febrile neutropenia?

Febrile neutropenia is having a fever when you have a low amount of white blood cells in your body. This is very serious. Febrile neutropenia needs immediate medical attention. Do not take any medicine to treat your fever until you have been directed by your treatment team. This includes over-the-counter pain or fever reducing medicine.

### Important Facts

- You are neutropenic when the amount of white blood cells in your body is low.
- When you have neutropenia, a simple infection is dangerous to your health.

### Preventing Infection During Neutropenia

- Wash your hands often with soap, especially before eating, after using the bathroom, and after sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose.
- Keep up your daily personal hygiene habits—bathing, showering, brushing teeth—even when you feel tired or sick.
- Do not put anything in the rectum—no enemas or suppositories.
- Women should not use tampons, vaginal suppositories, or douches.
- Avoid constipation. Ask your doctor or nurse if you should use a stool softener.
- Take your temperature if you feel sick.

### Other Ways to Help Prevent Infection:

- Avoid large crowds and sick people.
- Talk with your doctor about getting yearly flu vaccines (avoid nasal spray vaccines).
- Stay away from children who recently had live virus vaccines such as the chickenpox vaccine.
- Wash fresh fruit and vegetables before eating.
- Avoid being near fresh-cut flowers or other sources of standing water that can have bacteria.

### When should I call my doctor or nurse?

- If your fever is greater than 100.3°F, call your doctor or nurse right away.
- Call your health care provider if you have any of these symptoms:
  - Shaking chills or feeling like you have the flu
  - Sore throat or coughing
  - Burning or pain when you pee
  - Red or swollen area on the body

When you are neutropenic, you may get a fever even without an infection. Medical tests can tell if you have an infection or not.

If you do have an infection, your health care provider may give you antibiotics to treat it, and may also give you a medicine to boost blood cell growth.

If you are very sick, you may need to stay at the hospital to receive antibiotics through a vein in your arm.