

# MANAGING INFECTION

## INFECTION

It is important to know that, while on chemo, your body is more prone to infection. Many of the drugs used in chemo to fight cancer cells can also harm healthy cells, including white blood cells — the cells that fight against infection. Part of staying healthy and strong during treatment involves taking extra precautions to prevent and manage infection.

Your doctor will check your blood counts regularly. He or she will determine if your white cell count is low and if you need a treatment to increase your white cell count. A low white cell count is referred to as neutropenia.

### When You Have A Low White Cell Count

- Check your temperature regularly, as instructed by your doctor. Keep a record of your temperature readings and call your doctor if your temperature is above normal.
- Drink plenty of liquids, including water, fruit juices, and ice pops.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Regulate your body temperature, depending on whether you are hot or cold.
- Try a cold compress on your forehead if you are hot.

Besides white blood cells, your body has many ways to protect itself from infection — your skin, acids in your stomach, coughing and sneezing.

Even with your body's natural defenses working cancer treatments can put you at greater risk. If you suspect that you are experiencing signs of infection do not ignore them. Call your doctor immediately.

## POTENTIAL SYMPTOMS OF INFECTION

- Fever, with a temperature of 100.5°F or above
- Chills
- Severe cough
- Sore throat
- Sinus pain or pressure
- Earaches or headaches
- Frequent urination/burning during urination
- Diarrhea
- Mouth sores
- Redness or swelling of any area around a wound, pimple, sore, etc.
- Dizziness or weakness



## TIPS TO PREVENT INFECTION

- Wash your hands frequently throughout the day, especially before eating, after using the bathroom, and after touching animals.
- Avoid people who are sick with contagious illnesses, including a cold, the flu, measles, or chickenpox.
- Avoid crowds.
- Stay away from children who have recently been given “live virus” vaccines, such as chickenpox and oral polio.
- Be careful not to cut yourself in any way, including the cuticles of your nails. Use an electric shaver instead of a razor to avoid cutting yourself while shaving.
- Clean cuts and scrapes immediately with warm soapy water and an antiseptic.
- To protect your mouth and gums, brush your teeth after meals and before bedtime.
- Do not squeeze or scratch pimples.
- Take a warm (not hot) bath, shower, or sponge bath every day. Pat your skin dry; do not rub it.
- Use lotion or oil if your skin becomes dry.
- Avoid contact with animal litter boxes and waste, including bird cages and fish tanks.
- Avoid standing water, such as in bird baths, flower vases, or humidifiers.
- Wear gloves when gardening or cleaning up after others, especially small children.
- Consult your physician before receiving any type of immunizations or shot, such as flu or pneumonia shots.
- Do not eat raw fish, seafood, meat, or eggs.
- Talk to your doctor immediately if you suspect an infection.



## CALL YOUR DOCTOR

### **IF your temperature rises above normal IF you have any symptoms of infection**

Many of the drugs used in chemo get rid of cancerous cells, but also healthy cells. That is why, even if you are very careful, you still may be at risk for infection. It is important to take precautions.

The National Cancer Institute (NCI) offers the following suggestions for reducing your risk of infection.



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