

Neutropenia

A neutrophil is a type of white blood cell found in the bloodstream that helps your body fight infection.

Neutropenia means the numbers of neutrophils in the bloodstream are below normal. If this happens, you are at a high risk for getting an infection. Think of the neutrophil as a bodyguard. When you have less bodyguards around to protect you, you can get sick easily because your body's defenses are reduced.

Chemotherapy is one of the most common causes of neutropenia because it can possibly weaken 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 fever of 101°F (38.3°C) or higher, contact your doctor **right away** or go to the nearest hospital emergency center. **Do not** take any medicines to lower your temperature unless directed by your doctor. This may hide an infection that is getting worse.

Possible Signs of Infection

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

- Fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher 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 gets worse
- Shortness of breath
- Pain in the abdomen or rectum
- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Burning or pain when you pee
- 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

- Wash your hands often, especially before eating, after using the restroom and after touching doorknobs and handrails.
- Take a warm (not hot) shower every day.
- Clean your teeth and gums using a soft toothbrush.

Protect Your Skin

- Never walk barefoot.
- Moisturize dry skin with creams, lotions or oils.
- Wear gloves when washing dishes or cleaning with chemicals.
- Cover any scrapes with a bandage.
- Use an electric shaver, not a razor.
- Limit sun exposure.

Watch Your Diet

- Clean and cook all foods completely.
- Avoid eating raw fruits and vegetables. Produce from a can or jar is usually safe since it has been processed.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of fluids each day to help avoid constipation.

What to Avoid

Avoid the following people, places or activities to reduce your risk of infection:

- Large crowds. Do not go to concerts, movie theaters, sporting events or shopping malls.
- Anyone with signs of an infection, such as fever, cough or runny nose
- People with shingles or chicken pox
- Gardening
- Pet litter boxes and pet waste

Wear a hospital mask to prevent exposure to airborne germs that cause respiratory infection.