

# Neutropenia

Neutropenia is a decrease in the number of neutrophils, which are the white blood cells that fight infection. When your white blood cells are low, you are at risk for infection. Your healthcare team will tell you when your white blood cells are low.

## Signs and Symptoms of Infection

- A fever of 100.4° F or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Chills or sweating
- Cough or sore throat
- Redness or swelling around skin sores
- Loose bowels or diarrhea
- Burning sensation during urination
- Unusual vaginal discharge or itching

## Things to Do

- Take your oral temperature daily; **if 100.4°F or greater, call your healthcare team immediately.**
- Wash hands often, especially before eating and after using the bathroom; use warm water and friction.
- After each bowel movement, wipe from front to back, gently cleaning the rectal area.
- Shower daily using warm water and soap; pat skin dry.
- Keep mouth clean by brushing after meals and at bedtime; replace toothbrush every month or after any mouth infection.
- Use lotions or moisturizers if skin becomes dry or cracked.
- Use an electric shaver, not a razor.
- Use antiseptic soap to clean cuts and scrapes; cover new cuts and scrapes with a bandage to keep clean.
- Wear protective gloves when gardening or cleaning up after pets.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Make sure all foods are thoroughly cooked.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables.
- Practice safe sex.

## Things to Avoid

- Uncooked fruits and vegetables that cannot be washed thoroughly
- Raw fish or meats
- Deli meats
- Crowds of people
- Persons who are sick
- Activities that may cause cuts or breaks in skin
- Animal/pet stool or urine
- Stagnant water (vases, denture cups)
- Walking barefoot
- Sharing cups or eating utensils

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## Food Precautions for Patients with a Low White Blood Cell Count

### General Recommendations

- Wash your hands often to prevent the spread of bacteria.
- Check dates on food and do not eat foods that are out of date.
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator or microwave. Never thaw foods at room temperature. Cook foods immediately after thawing.
- Refrigerate all leftovers within one hour after cooking and eat them within 3 days.
- Avoid wooden cutting boards. Choose plastic or rubber cutting boards and clean them thoroughly with antibacterial soap after each use.
- Use a clean cutting board for fresh produce and a separate one for raw meat, fish and poultry.
- Wash all fruits, vegetables, fresh herbs, sprouts thoroughly.

**Note:** Your healthcare team may instruct you to avoid fresh fruits and vegetables at some point during your care.

### Foods to Avoid

- Rare or medium rare cooked beef, pork, poultry and lamb
- Raw eggs, raw honey, raw fish and shellfish such as sushi, clams and oysters
- Salad bars and buffets
- Deli sandwiches and pre-made salads

### Safe Cooking Temperatures:

- Beef, pork veal, and lamb (steaks, roasts, and chops) ..... 145°
- Poultry (includes chicken, turkey, and duck) ..... 165°
- Ground meat
  - Beef, pork, veal, and lamb ..... 160°
  - Turkey and chicken..... 165°
- Seafood (all fish and shellfish)..... 145° and flesh is opaque
- Egg dishes and sauces..... 160° and until yolk & white are firm
- Leftovers and casseroles..... 165°