

Low White Blood Cells: Your Infection Safety Guide

Medical-Surgical · Hematology / Oncology

Neutropenia means you have too few neutrophils, the white blood cells that fight germs. Cancer treatment often causes it. Infections get serious fast when your count is low, so these steps protect you.

Fever is an emergency

- Check your temperature by mouth if you feel warm, chilled, or unwell.
- **If it is 100.4 F (38 C) or higher, call your cancer care team right away, day or night. If you cannot reach them, go to the emergency room now.**
- Do not take acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or aspirin before you call.
- Your team's 24-hour number: _____.

Keep germs away

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for 20 seconds, or use hand sanitizer.
- Stay away from crowds and from people who are sick.
- Do not clean litter boxes, bird cages, or fish tanks.
- Get no live vaccines, such as the nasal flu spray, unless your cancer team says so.

Handle food safely

- Cook meat, chicken, fish, and eggs all the way. No runny yolks.
- Wash fruits and vegetables well.
- Avoid raw milk, unpasteurized juice, raw sprouts, and raw fish such as sushi.

Protect your mouth and body

- Brush with a soft toothbrush after meals and at bedtime.
- Rinse with salt and baking soda water, or an alcohol-free mouthwash.
- No rectal temperatures, enemas, or suppositories.

Call your provider today if you have

- **A temperature of 100.4 F (38 C) or higher, or chills: call right away**
- A cough, sore throat, or mouth sores
- Burning when you urinate, or diarrhea
- Redness, swelling, or pus where your IV line goes in

Call 911 or your local emergency number if you have

- Fever with confusion, or you are very hard to wake
- Fever with fast breathing or trouble breathing
- Fever with dizziness, fainting, or cold, clammy skin

This handout supports, not replaces, advice from your own nurse or doctor.

Online: nclexpace.com/patient-education/neutropenia-infection-precautions/patient

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