



# Neutropenia

## What is neutropenia?

- There are three main types of cells in your blood: white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets.
- Neutrophils are a type of white blood cell that help your body fight infections.
- Neutropenia is when your body does not make enough neutrophils.
- This puts you at risk of getting an infection more easily, or makes it harder for you to fight an infection once you have one.

## How do I know if I have neutropenia?

- Your complete blood count (routine blood test) shows the number of neutrophils in your blood.
- If the number is too low it means you have neutropenia.
- Your healthcare team will tell you if you are taking medication that puts you at risk of getting neutropenia.

## When you have neutropenia you need to watch for signs of infections.

- An infection when you have neutropenia is a medical emergency.
- Even if you do not feel sick you need to get help right away.

## Things to know about fever:

- A fever is a sign that your body may be fighting an infection.
- You have a fever if the temperature taken in your

mouth is above 38.3°C or 100.9°F at any time  
OR above 38.0°C or 100.4°F for at least one hour.

- Take your temperature with an oral (mouth) thermometer every day when you have neutropenia or whenever you feel unwell
- Medications like acetaminophen (Tylenol®), Aspirin®, ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) and others may hide a fever. Check with your healthcare team before taking any of these medications.

## If you have a fever get medical help right away.

You may also notice these other signs of infection. Speak to your healthcare team or go to the nearest emergency department right away if you notice any of these things:

- Feeling hot or unwell
- Chills or shaking
- Sweating more than normal
- Burning feeling when peeing or peeing more often than usual
- Redness, heat, swelling and fluid leaking from a wound or your skin
- Cough with yellow or green coloured mucous
- Sore throat or sores in your mouth with a fever
- Diarrhea with a fever
- Unusual vaginal discharge or itching

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## What to do when you have neutropenia:

### Keep clean and stay away from germs:

- Wash your hands often with soap and water, before eating and after using the toilet. Keep your hands away from your mouth.
- Clean scrapes or cuts on the skin immediately with soap and water or saline.
- Avoid crowds in places like crowded shopping malls or theatres while your neutrophil counts are low.
- Do not touch animal droppings, litter boxes, fish tanks or birdcages. (If you must clean up after an animal, use gloves).
- Do not work in the garden or with soil unless you are wearing gloves.

### Mouth Care:

- Keep your mouth clean and moist. See the pamphlet Mouth Care for more information on good mouth care habits.
- Check with your doctor before you have any dental check-ups, dental procedures, or other medical procedures.

### Eating and drinking:

- Eat a well-balanced diet. Wash all fruits and vegetables. Avoid raw meat, raw fish and soft cheeses. Cook your food to a safe temperature.
- Drink 6-8 cups of liquid each day unless your healthcare team told you otherwise.
- Do not share drinking glasses or eating utensils.

### Vaccines:

- Do not have any vaccinations unless you check with your doctor.

### Prevent cuts or tears to your anal (bum) area:

- Prevent constipation and do not strain when having a bowel movement. If you need a laxative, ask your healthcare team to recommend one.
- Avoid rectal suppositories or enemas when your neutrophils are low.