

Medical Oncology

Neutropenia Information Sheet

What is neutropenia?

Neutropenia is when your ANC is less than 1,000. You are at greater risk to get an infection. If your ANC is at this level, you need to be careful to avoid infection. If you do get an infection, tell your doctor or nurse right away.

If your ANC is less than 500 you are severely neutropenic. This puts you at the greatest risk for infection. Sometimes the normal bacteria in your body can cause an infection. Do not take any medicine to reduce a fever without checking with your doctor. This may hide the infection and it can get worse.

Signs and symptoms of infection that you should be looking for:

- Fever (100.4° or higher)
- Shaking chills (even if no fever)
- Flushed skin, sweating
- Frequent urination or burning when urinating, cloudy or bloody urine.
- Redness, tenderness, swelling, drainage, odor or pain anywhere on the body.
- General feeling of tiredness or flu-like symptoms (sore throat, sneezing, runny nose, coughing, nausea or vomiting, diarrhea, shortness of breath, chest discomfort, sores in your mouth).

What should I do if I have one or more of these symptoms?

You must contact your doctor right away.

How can I help prevent infections?

- Washing your hands often is very important. Make sure to wash your hands before eating, and after using the toilet, blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. You may also use hand sanitizer or wipes.
- Check your temperature once a day when you are neutropenic and call your doctor right away if your temperature is 100.4° or higher.
- Check for signs of infection such as the site of a central venous catheter or port, any tube or catheter site. Also check the mouth, groin and private areas for redness, warmth or open sores.
- Avoid having contact with crowds and people with illness or infection.
- Maintain good oral hygiene.
- Rinse teeth and gums with plain water after meals and at bedtime.
- Use a soft toothbrush. Floss only if ANC is greater than 500 and platelet count is greater than 50,000.

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- Wear well-fitting dentures.
- Have dental work done only if you first consult your doctor.
- Use lubricant (such as A+D® Ointment or Vaseline®) on lips to prevent chapping.
- Be careful cleaning bird cages, cat litter boxes, pet excrement, and fish tanks. Wash or sanitize your hands after cleaning up after your pets.
- Be careful if you have manicures, pedicures or false nails applied. Make sure that supplies are clean. Watch for any signs of infection.
- Be careful in public hot tubs, Jacuzzis and swimming pools.
- If you cut or scrape your skin, clean the area right away with soap and warm water, and then apply a bandage.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
- Wash raw vegetables and fruits well before eating them.
- Do not eat raw or undercooked seafood, meat, poultry or eggs.
- Do not consume food or drinks that are moldy, spoiled, or past the freshness date.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk or juice.
- Use clean kitchen utensils and cutting boards. Use separate cutting boards for meat, poultry and fish.
- Avoid using enemas, rectal thermometers, and suppositories. Women should not douche or use tampons or vaginal suppositories.
- To promote hygiene during sexual activity, avoid excess friction during intercourse by using a water-based lubricant. Avoid rectal intercourse. Use a birth control method recommended by your nurse or doctor.

Is there a treatment for neutropenia?

- You may receive an injection after chemotherapy to help your body make more white blood cells and neutrophils.

Note: The most common side effect of this treatment is achiness in the bones or muscles. A small percentage of patients may have achiness from mild to severe. If you have this side effect, it can usually be relieved with a non-aspirin pain reliever, such as acetaminophen. Please let your nurse or doctor know if you are having severe achiness that is not relieved by pain medicine.

- You may be directed to take Loratadine to reduce your achiness.
- You may be given antibiotics if you develop an infection.
- See the *Chemotherapy and Immunotherapy Patient Guide* book for more information.

If you have questions or concerns, please call your care team at:

Bronson Cancer Center – Battle Creek 269-245-8660

Bronson Cancer Center – Kalamazoo 269-286-7170

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