

CANCER TREATMENT & LOW WHITE BLOOD CELL COUNT

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What are white blood cells?

White blood cells are the cells in the body that fight many types of infections. They are a part of the immune system. The longer a person's white blood cell count remains low, the greater the risk for infection. Certain chemotherapy drugs and radiation therapy can make it harder for the body to make white blood cells.

What can be done to prevent infections?

Reduce exposure to new germs:

- Wash hands often.
- Wear protective gloves when gardening or cleaning up after others.
- Avoid contact with animal litter boxes, birdcages and fish tanks.
- Try to avoid crowds. Stay away from people who have illnesses.
- Cook food thoroughly and wash all fruits and vegetables well.
- Do not smoke, it can increase the risk for lung infections.
- Do not cut or tear cuticles or nails.
- Avoid cuts in skin, clean any cuts well with soap and water.

Protect and clean skin, mouth, and rectal area:

- Keep areas where skin touches skin clean and dry (such as under arms, groin, under breasts). Use lotion or oil to soften and heal skin if it becomes dry and cracked.
- Maintain good mouth care. Brush teeth carefully and gently.
- Clean rectal area gently but thoroughly after each bowel movement. Do not use enemas or suppositories without consulting your physician.

When should I call the Physician?

- Fever of 101 or higher or shaking chills.
- Diarrhea or constipation.
- Severe cough or sore throat.
- Mouth sores, blisters on the lips or skin
- Unusual redness, swelling or tenderness.
- Unusual vaginal discharge or itching.
- Frequency, urgency or a burning feeling when urinating.
- Sinus pain, earaches, headaches or stiff neck.

If you have been told that your white blood count is low, do not take products with aspirin or make dental appointments until speaking with your physician.