

**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.**