

# How to Deal With Low White Blood Cells

## Low White Blood Cells

Chemotherapy and radiation affect the bone marrow where all your blood cells are made. The majority of patients receiving chemotherapy, radiation or both will have some low blood counts. The white blood cells are your infection-fighting cells, so when they are lowered, usually 7 to 14 days after treatment, you are at a higher risk for getting an infection.

## When to Call Your Nurse or Doctor

Tell your nurse or doctor if you have:

- a temperature higher than 101 F
- shaking or chills
- burning or frequent urination
- a cough or sore throat
- redness, swelling or drainage in any area.

## Ways to Help Prevent Getting an Infection

- Remind all visitors to wash their hands. Hand washing is the most important way to prevent spreading an infection.
- Do not have more than three visitors at one time. Family or friends should not visit if they have skin, intestinal or respiratory infections. Only children who are family members should visit. Those children should not have come in contact with exposure to an illness that can be spread within the last 3 weeks.

- Wear a special filter mask (N95) if you leave your room.
- Keep your hospital room door closed at all times. Leave your bathroom door open. (This helps the air circulation work to protect you.)
- Do not have fresh plants, flowers or dried moss in your room.
- Do not let anyone bring you food made outside the hospital unless your doctor says it is OK. If it is OK, eat the food right away.
- Be sure to wash all fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Brush your teeth with a soft bristled toothbrush or a sponge brush.
- Rinse your mouth with a salt solution 4 times a day to keep your mouth moist and clean.
- If you are a woman of child-bearing age, do not use tampons.
- Practice proper skin care. Pat, don't rub, your skin. Do not use a straight edge razor — only use an electric razor.
- Do not keep any water pitchers at your bedside. Bacteria can form in stale water.

Your white blood cell count will get better. Until then, it is important to take these extra precautions to prevent infections.

Ask your nurse if you have any questions about low white blood cell counts and infection precautions.