

Infection

Chemotherapy can make you more likely to get infections. This happens because most anticancer drugs affect the bone marrow and decrease its ability to produce white blood cells, the cells that fight many types of infections. An infection can begin in almost any part of your body including your mouth, skin, lungs, urinary tract, rectum, and reproductive tract.

“The blood counts fall early in the second week and come up by end of third week. During this time patient is more prone to infections, one should be careful to prevent contact with infected people, dust, smoke and things that are infective. During this week one must avoid consumption of unwashed food articles, fruits like grapes, exposed salads, water from an unknown source. Peel fruit before eating. Skin of fruit is sometimes contaminated with pesticides.

Your doctor will check your blood cell count often while you are getting chemotherapy. Your doctor also may add colony-stimulating factors to your treatment to keep your blood count from getting too far below normal. In spite of these extra steps, however, your white blood cell count still may drop. If this happens, your doctor may postpone your next treatment or give you a lower dose of drugs for a while.

When your white count is lower than normal, it is very important to try to prevent infections by taking the following steps:

- Wash your hands often during the day. Be sure to wash them extra well before you eat and before and after you use the washroom.
- Clean your rectal area gently but thoroughly after each bowel movement. Ask your doctor or nurse for advice if the area becomes irritated or if you have haemorrhoids. Also, check with your doctor before using enemas or suppositories.
- Stay away from people who have diseases you can catch, such as a cold, the flu, measles, or chickenpox. Also try to avoid crowds.
- Stay away from children who recently have received immunizations, such as vaccines for polio, measles, mumps and rubella (German measles).
- Don't cut or tear the cuticles of your nails.
- Be careful not to cut or nick yourself when using scissors, needles, or knives.
- Be especially careful when cutting meat.
- Be careful while shaving and avoid cutting yourself. If you have a bleeding tendency do not shave at all.
- Use a soft toothbrush that won't hurt your gums.
- Don't squeeze or scratch pimples.
- Take a warm (not hot) bath, shower, or sponge bath every day. Pat your skin dry using a light touch. Don't rub.
- Use lotion or oil to soften and heal your skin if it becomes dry and cracked.
- Clean cuts and scrapes right away with warm water, soap, and an antiseptic.
- Wear protective gloves when gardening or cleaning up after animals and others, especially small children.
- Do not get any immunization shots without checking first with your doctor to see if it's all right.

Most infections come from the bacteria normally found on the skin and in the intestines and genital tract. In some cases, the cause of an infection may not be known. When your white

blood cell count is low, your body may not be able to fight off infections. So, even if you take extra care, you still may get an infection.

Be alert to the signs that you might have an infection and check your body regularly for its signs, paying special attention to your eyes, nose, mouth, and genital and rectal areas. The symptoms of infection include:

- Fever over 100 degrees F. If you have a fever, don't use aspirin, acetaminophen, or any other medicine to bring your temperature down without first checking with your doctor.
- Chills.
- Sweating.
- Loose bowels (this can also be a side effect of chemotherapy).
- A burning feeling when you urinate.
- A severe cough or sore throat.
- Unusual vaginal discharge or itching.
- Redness or swelling, especially around a wound, sore, pimple, or intravenous catheter sites. Report any signs of infection to your doctor right away. This is especially important when your white blood cell count is low.