

Patient Information Sheet—Neutropenia

(low white blood cell count)

What is Neutropenia?

Neutropenia occurs when a certain type of white blood cell—called neutrophils—are low. These white blood cells, which are made in your bone marrow, are important to fight infection and keep you healthy. When the number of neutrophils in the blood becomes low, your body might find it harder to fight infection.

This information sheet will help you to know what to do if you feel unwell, with or without a fever.

How will I know if I have Neutropenia?

Most people who have neutropenia do not know it. They do not have any symptoms and do not feel sick. Having a blood test is the only way to confirm if you have neutropenia.

There are signs that should alert you to possible infection:

1. **Fever** - A fever is a body temperature above 38°C or 100.4°F. It is most accurate to take your temperature with a digital thermometer.
2. **Any of the following symptoms with or without a fever** -
 - Chills/shaking
 - New cough
 - Shortness of breath
 - Sore throat
 - Mouth sores
 - Abdominal (belly) pain
 - Diarrhea, nausea, vomiting
 - Having to pass small amounts of urine often
 - Burning feeling when you pass urine
 - Urine that is strong-smelling or cloudy (not clear) or red or pink in color
 - Flu-like symptoms such as body aches and feeling tired
 - Pain, redness or swelling on skin, especially around an IV or PICC line or around wounds
 - Green or yellow drainage from a cut or wound

What causes Neutropenia?

Many things can cause neutropenia but the most common causes are:

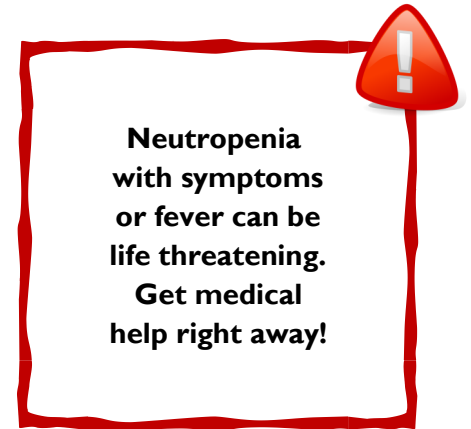
Chemotherapy - Chemotherapy can affect the bone marrow and slow down how many white blood cells are being made. This can cause neutropenia.

Radiation Therapy - Large bones like the breast bone or hip bones have more bone marrow in them. Radiation to these bones can affect the bone marrow and slow down how many white blood cells are being made. This can cause neutropenia. If you are having chemotherapy and radiation together, this may increase the risk of neutropenia.

Cancer or Blood Disorders - Some types of cancer or blood disorders cause low white cells without having any treatment.

How might having Neutropenia affect my treatment?

Your Cancer Team may decide to delay your treatment or lower the dose to keep you as healthy as possible during treatment. The decision will be based on **YOUR** treatment plan and **YOUR** health.



How do I help prevent infection?

DO wash your hands

- Always before eating and after going to the bathroom
- After contact with pets
- Carry hand sanitizer with you in case you don't have access to soap and water

DO bathe or shower daily and change clothes daily



DO try to prevent scrapes, scratches or injury to skin. This includes mouth, penis, vagina and anus

DO check with your Cancer Team

- Before having any immunizations
- Before having dental work or teeth cleaning. Let your dentist know that you are having cancer treatment
- About sexual activity when you are neutropenic
- About avoiding large crowds

**TALK WITH
YOUR
CANCER TEAM
ABOUT
PREVENTING
INFECTION!**



DON'T go near anyone who has a cold, flu, diarrhea or other contagious illnesses (e.g. chicken pox, shingles)

DON'T take Tylenol® regularly unless your oncologist or hematologist has said this is OK. Tylenol® will mask a fever.

What should I do if my temperature is greater than 38°C/100.4°F or if I become unwell?

If you feel very unwell, go to your nearest emergency department.

Bring all the medications you are taking with you.

Tell the Emergency Department staff:

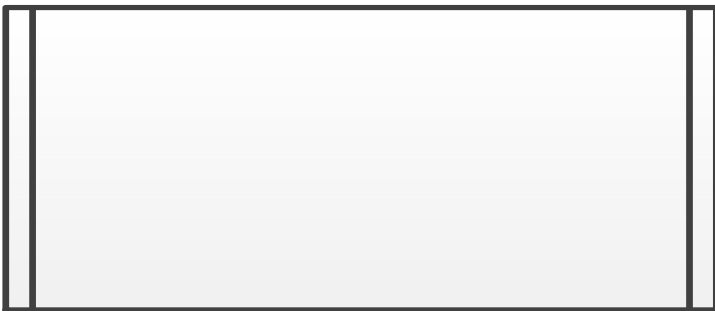
- the name of your cancer or blood disorder
- the type of treatment you are on—it is helpful to know the name of any cancer drug
- the first day of your most recent treatment (chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy)

Get the right medical help as soon as possible

If you have questions or concerns:

Monday to Friday 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

Call your Cancer Team at:



OR CALL

Urgent Cancer Care

204-787-8900

After Hours or Weekends

All CCMB patients may call Paging:

- Health Sciences Centre **204-787-2071**
- St. Boniface Hospital **204-237-2053**

Ask for the On Call Service:

- Medical Oncology
- Hematology
- Radiation Oncology
- Gynecology Oncology
- Surgical Oncology
- Leukemia/Bone Marrow Transplant