

Low White Blood Count (Neutropenia)

What you need to know and why:

There are three main types of cells in your blood, white cells, red cells and platelets. Neutrophils are white blood cells, which destroy bacteria. Chemotherapy causes the number of neutrophils to fall. This may increase your risk of developing an infection. This usually happens 7-14 days after your treatment.

Your treatment may be delayed for one week or longer if your neutrophils are not at a safe level to administer the chemotherapy. The dose of chemotherapy may also be adjusted at your next visit.

Due to the reduced number of white cells, your body's only response to infection may be an elevated temperature. You may feel relatively well, but still have a serious problem. **Any fever needs to be taken seriously and reported immediately. You must have a working thermometer at home.**

What you need to watch for:

- Fever 38°C (100°F) or higher
- Shaking chills
- Unusual sweating
- Sore throat (along with fever)
- Burning feeling when passing urine and/or more frequent urination
- Generally feeling unwell
- Redness, heat, swelling and drainage from a wound
- Cough with yellow or green coloured sputum
- Diarrhea (along with fever)

Call immediately if temperature 38°C or 100°F or higher

Do not take Tylenol or Aspirin to lower your temperature unless an oncologist tells you to

Call if you have any of the symptoms listed above:

- Oncology Clinic - Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.: **905-682-6451**
- After hours and holidays call: **905-685-8082**

To Help Prevent Infections:

- Wash your hands often and always before eating and after using the washroom.
- Avoid crowds and people who have known infection.
- Maintain good personal hygiene.
- Follow instructions for mucositis.

Treatment:

Antibiotics are often used to treat this problem. You may have to be admitted to the hospital for IV antibiotics until blood counts recover.