

## Fever and infection

### What should I look out for when getting treatment?

Chemotherapy commonly causes the white blood cell count to drop, making you vulnerable to serious infections without warning signs. If you notice any of the following, notify your doctor *immediately*:

- temperature (fever) over 100.4 degree F
- shaking chills or excessive tiredness with “flu-like” symptoms
- loose bowels for more than two days
- a burning feeling when passing urine
- cough, shortness of breath or sore throat

### What dietary precautions should I take?

We no longer advise special “neutropenic diets” but it is important to avoid constipation and practice good mouth care. You should examine the inside of your mouth routinely, especially areas that feel sore. Oral infections may appear as tender red or white, raised patches.

- Avoid acidic foods, such as tomato, orange and grapefruit juices, spices and (for older patients) tobacco and alcohol.
- Make sure your diet has adequate bulk with fruit, vegetables, and whole grain.
- Be sure to wash fresh fruit and vegetables thoroughly before eating.
- Avoid street foods or food cooked outside the house
- Drink adequate liquids each day (five to six glasses for an adult)
- Brush your teeth twice daily using a soft bristle toothbrush.
- If your mouth is sore, rinse well with a diluted salt-water solution. Avoid commercial mouth washes, which contain alcohol that can burn your mouth.
- After a bowel movement, wash your rectal area gently with water, and avoid suppositories and enemas.

### What other precautions should I take?

Germs can get into your body through breaks in your skin, so take sensible precautions:

- Avoid cuts and scratches, and excessive skin dryness (e.g. from bodywash).
- Avoid excessive handwashing, or washing with alcohol based cleansers
- Wear shoes or slippers when walking, and gloves when working outdoors or washing dishes.
- Avoid grooming pets and other pet-care tasks, such as cleaning bird cages

### Can I go outside the house?

There are periods during treatment when your white blood cell counts will be very low and it may be prudent to stay indoors. After checking with your doctor you may go outside as long as you avoid crowds. A mask provides some protection and can help signal you are at risk:

- Avoid crowds such as movie theaters, malls, temples
- Avoid airplane, bus travel or other public transport
- Avoid large numbers of visitors to the house, including relatives or friends.