

## Low White Blood Cell Count

### *About neutropenia*

### What is neutropenia?

*Neutropenia* is a decrease in the number of white blood cells (*neutrophils*). These neutrophils are the body's main defense against bacterial and fungal infections.

Neutropenia increases your risk for infection, especially airborne illnesses like colds, flu, and pneumonia. Neutropenia is common after receiving chemotherapy or radiation.

### How will I know if I have neutropenia?

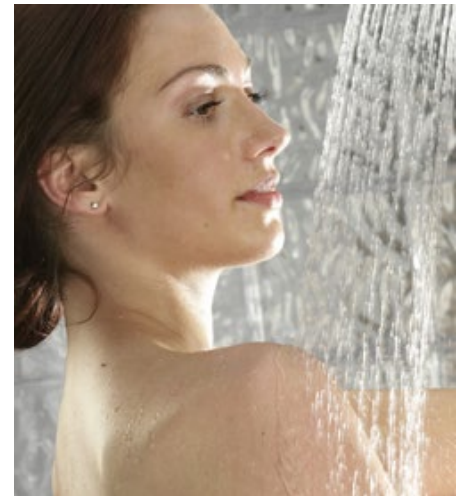
A normal range of neutrophils is 1,800 to 7,000 in a cubic milliliter of blood. You may see this written as "1.8 to 7.0 mm<sup>3</sup>." We consider you *neutropenic* if your neutrophils go below 1,000 (1.0 mm<sup>3</sup>).

We will do blood tests to check your levels of neutrophils. If you become neutropenic, we will contact you.

### What should I do if I have neutropenia?

Follow these tips to help prevent an infection:

- Stay away from people who are sick. Avoid crowds.
- Wash your hands often. Avoid touching your face, eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Shower every day to keep your skin clean.
- Use disinfectant wipes to clean objects that you touch often. This includes phones, door handles, and your computer keyboard and mouse.
- Avoid getting cuts or scratches. Shave with an electric razor.



*Shower every day to wash away germs and keep your skin clean.*

- Always wipe from front to back after a bowel movement.
- Fully wash raw fruits and vegetables before you eat them.
- Avoid moldy cheeses and fermented food and drinks.
- Fully cook meat, seafood, and eggs before you eat them.
- Avoid fresh flowers, gardening, and contact with pet waste.
- If your neutrophils are below 500 (0.5), avoid having sexual intercourse. Your risk is higher for getting a urinary tract infection (UTI).

### Warning Signs

- Go to the emergency room **right away** if you have:
  - Fever of 100.5°F (38°C) or higher
  - Chills or shivering (*rigors*)
  - Nasal drainage, coughing with mucus, chest pain, or trouble breathing
- Call your doctor or nurse **right away** if you have:
  - Sinus congestion
  - Cough
  - A low fever
  - A wound that won't heal
  - Sore throat
  - Pain or burning when you urinate, or urinating often

### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

#### To talk with a nurse:

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call 206.598.2282 and select option 2.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call our Community Care Line at 206.598.3300.

### How is neutropenia treated?

- If there is a clear cause for your neutropenia, such as a medicine that is causing it, we may change your prescription.
- If you have mild neutropenia, you may not need treatment.
- If you have moderate to severe neutropenia, you may need treatment. We may give you an injection in your stomach of a drug called filgrastim (Neupogen).

### How long does neutropenia last?

How long someone stays neutropenic is different for everyone. We will tell you how often to get blood work done so that we can keep checking your neutrophils.