

Preventing Infections

Chemotherapy can slow down your body from making white blood cells, which helps you to fight off infections. Low white blood cell count is called “neutropenia.” Washing your hands with soap and water is the best way to kill germs. If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol and wash with soap and water as soon as you can. Do not use hand sanitizer if your hands are visibly dirty or greasy — for example, after gardening, playing outdoors, fishing or camping.



Hand washing instructions

- Wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, or use hand sanitizers:
 - After using the bathroom
 - Before, during and after preparing food
 - Before eating food
 - Before and after caring for someone at home who is sick with vomiting or diarrhea
 - After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet
 - After blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing
 - After touching an animal, animal feed or animal waste
 - After handling pet food or pet treats
 - After touching garbage

What to do

- Wear a mask as recommended by your doctor.
- If you have an IV catheter device, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before and after caring for your catheter, port or other access device. Follow directions given by the health care team to change dressing and caps, and flush the catheter.
- Bathe daily, paying special attention to areas under the arm, around genital areas and under skinfolds, which hold bacteria.
- Prevent injury to skin, such as tears, cuts or friction.
- Try to stay away from large crowds if you can.
- Minimize exposure to visitors, school-age children or children in day care.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables very well.
- Check expiration dates on food; throw dented cans away.
- Keep your kitchen and bathroom regularly sanitized.
- Make sure you refrigerate foods right away (groceries and leftovers).
- Avoid getting food and drinks (e.g., soda, milkshakes) from self-serve/fast food restaurants or public places.
- Be aware of mold, moisture build up in your walls, etc. Address as appropriate.

What not to do

- Do not visit friends or family who are sick or coughing.
- Do not get a live vaccination unless you get approval from your doctor.
- Do not thaw food at room temperature. Thaw food in the refrigerator, or you can also thaw food in frequently changed cold water or in the microwave, but cook it as soon as it thaws.
- Do not drink unpasteurized milk and juices.
- Foods to avoid:
 - Raw or undercooked meat or poultry
 - Hot dogs and deli meats that have not been reheated
 - Any raw or undercooked fish or shellfish, or food containing raw or undercooked seafood (e.g., sashimi found in sushi, ceviche, etc.)
 - Partially cooked seafood (e.g., shrimp and crab)
 - Foods that contain undercooked eggs (e.g., homemade Caesar salad dressings, raw cookie dough, eggnog)
 - Raw sprouts (e.g., alfalfa, beans or any other sprout)
 - Unwashed fresh fruit and vegetables, including lettuce and salads
 - Soft cheeses from unpasteurized raw milk (e.g., feta, brie, Camembert, blue, queso fresco)

When to call the doctor or nurse

Tell your doctor or nurse immediately if you notice any signs of infection:

- Temperature greater than 100.4 F
- New cough (may or may not have mucus with cough)
- Shortness of breath
- Frequent need to urinate or trouble passing urine
- Burning pain when you urinate
- Blood in your urine or stools
- Diarrhea lasting more than 24 hours
- Red, swollen or draining IV catheter site
- Mouth sores, cold sores or white patches in your mouth
- Shaking chills or body aches
- Skin breakdown or open sores — call your doctor or nurse right away if you see drainage, pus or bleeding.
- Red or swollen eyes



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