

THE EFFECT OF CHEMOTHERAPY ON WHITE BLOOD CELLS

■ Important information for you

Blood is composed of several types of cell: red and white cells and platelets.

Chemotherapy acts on all the body's cells and prevents them from multiplying. Those that multiply very fast, like blood cells, are the most affected and their number decreases.

This decrease varies: it may be slight or very considerable, depending on the different combinations of chemicals administered. Your blood cell count is checked very regularly by means of a blood test known as a 'complete blood count' (CBC).

White blood cells

The different types of white blood cells protect your body from infection. When their number goes below a certain level (neutropenia), you risk catching infections more easily. Prudence is recommended in such a case.

If the number of white blood cells, particularly the neutrophils, goes too low (to less than 500 per cubic millimetre), this is known as agranulocytosis. The risk of infection is serious and protective measures have to be taken and respected. In some cases, particularly if you are running a fever, the medical team will decide to admit you to hospital. You will then stay from a few days to several weeks in a private room in order to reduce the risk of catching an infection while your immunity is very low.

In certain situations, the oncologist will decide to stimulate the growth of your white blood cells by means of injections.

Some advice when your white blood cell count is low

- ▶ Check your temperature when in doubt.
- ▶ Report any shivering or feverishness.
- ▶ Take a bottle of disinfectant for the hands with you and use it after every contact with objects in public places (lift buttons, handles on buses, WCs etc.).
- ▶ Avoid very busy places such as public transport, shops, restaurants etc., or wear a mask when you visit them.

Some advice

- ▶ Choose off-peak hours for your shopping.
- ▶ Avoid contact with sick people.
- ▶ Be careful around infants and schoolchildren, as they are often the source of colds, ear infections, coughs etc.
- ▶ Avoid handling pets' litter.
- ▶ Choose cooked food, pasteurized cheese, fruit that has been washed and peeled and avoid unpackaged spices.
- ▶ Keep your food in a refrigerator and eat food cooked recently or kept chilled if it was not cooked that day.

In case of agranulocytosis in hospital

Protective measures are adopted

- ▶ Your temperature will be taken several times a day. Fever or shivering are the first warning signs of an infection.
- ▶ You can leave your room only exceptionally and must then wear a highly filtering mask. The windows must be kept closed.
- ▶ Although visits are recommended, they must be limited to two persons at a time.
- ▶ Staff and visitors wear masks and overalls and must systematically disinfect their hands.
- ▶ Anything entering your room must be decontaminated each day.
- ▶ Brush your teeth with a soft toothbrush to avoid harming your gums.
- ▶ Choose an electric razor and in general avoid any cuts.
- ▶ Plants and flowers are banned.



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INFO

Magazines and books are permitted so long as they are new. Laptops will be disinfected daily (the hospital has internet connection). You can add a personal touch to your room with posters, personal photos etc.