Neutropenia From Chemotherapy

Neutropenia is a condition that occurs when a certain kind of white blood cells called neutrophils became lower than normal. These cells are made in the bone marrow and fight infections. These cells protect against bacteria and viruses. The fewer number of neutrophils you have, and the longer your body remains without it, you become more at risk for a severe infection.

Neutropenia is one of the side effects of chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is used to get rid of certain bad cells in your body. In doing this, it also destroys some good cells that you need for good health.

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis is made by a blood test. A complete blood count is than performed. It is important to always check your white blood cell count before administering chemotherapy to make sure you are not neutropenic.

TREATMENT

A low white blood cell count may leave your body vulnerable to infection and too weak to receive chemotherapy. This could lead your doctor to delay your current treatment or reduce your doses until your count reaches sufficient levels.

You may also receive a blood growth factor called sargramostim (Leukine, Prokine). This stimulates white blood cell production.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- **Follow your caregiver's instructions exactly** as to when you are supposed to have blood work.
- Wash your hands often. This includes you and those who come in contact with you. This is the most important preventive measure!!!
- **Do not** eat raw fruits and vegetables. They can carry bacteria and fungi.
- Avoid people with colds or contagious diseases (chicken pox, herpes zoster, influenza).
- Avoid large crowds.
- Avoid constructions areas. These release fungus into the air that can be deadly to an immuno-compromised person.
- Caution with children in daycare or school environments.
- Take care of your respiratory system by coughing and deep breathing.
- Bathe daily.
- Protect your skin from cuts and burns.
- **Do not** work in the garden or with flowers and plants.
- Care for the mouth before and after meals with a soft toothbrush. If you have mucositis, do not use mouthwashes. These contain alcohol and dry out the mouth even more.
- Clean the perineal area after urination and bowel movements. This area is between your genitals and anus. Women need to wipe front to back after urination.
- Use a water soluble lubricant (K-Y lubricant) during sexual intercourse, and practice good hygiene after. Do not have intercourse if severely neutropenic. Check with your caregiver as they have set guidelines.
- Exercise daily as tolerated.
- Avoid people who were recently vaccinated with a live vaccine for at least 30 days. You should not receive live vaccines (polio, typhoid).
- **Do not** provide direct care for pets and avoid animal excreta. **Do not** clean litter boxes and bird cages.
- **Do not** share food utensils.
- **Do not** use tampons, enemas, or rectal suppositories unless directed by your caregiver.
- Use an electric razor to remove unwanted hair.

- Wash your hands after handling magazines, letters and newspapers.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- An oral temperature above 100.5º F (38.1º C) develops.
- There is any sign of an infection.
  - Fever.
  - Chills.
  - Nausea and vomiting.
  - Mouth Sores.
  - Pain and Aches.
  - Redness and swelling around open wounds.
  - Skin warm to touch.
  - Pus-like discharge from wounds.
  - Shaking.
  - Swollen lymph nodes.
  - Weakness.
  - Fatigue.
  - Red steaks on the skin.

Document Released: 12/12/2002 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.