Neutropenic Diet

If you have a weakened immune system, following a *Neutropenic diet* (sometimes called a *"low-bacteria diet*") will reduce the risk of becoming ill from eating food. This diet is often recommended before and after certain cancer treatments and during recovery after an organ or bone marrow transplant. It is important to follow these guidelines until the immune system returns to normal. Periodic measurements of the blood count (which includes a "*neutrophil* count" as part of the white blood count) help to guide your caregiver on the status of the immune system after chemotherapy or transplant surgery.

Bacteria and other harmful microorganisms are most likely to be present in raw or fresh foods. Thoroughly cooking foods destroys these microorganisms. For example, fresh vegetables should be cooked until tender, meats should be cooked until well-done, and eggs should be cooked until the yolk is firm.

Certain food products, such as milk, are treated with a method known as *pasteurization*. Pasteurization briefly exposes food to high heat that kills any bacteria. Look for dairy products, juices, and ciders that have the word "pasteurized" on the label.

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- Check expiration dates on all products before you buy them. Be sure nothing you buy is past the expiration date.
- Wash the following items with soap and hot water before and after touching food:
  - Counter tops.
  - Cutting boards (wash these in a dishwasher if you have one).
  - All cooking utensils.
  - All silverware.
  - All pots and pans.
- The food preparer should wash hands frequently with warm soapy water and dry with paper towels. This is especially important after touching raw meat, chicken, eggs, and fish.
- Wash dishes in hot soapy water or in dishwasher. Air dry dishes. DO NOT use a cloth towel.
- Keep perishable food very hot or very cold. DO NOT leave perishable items at room temperature for more than 10 to 15 minutes.
- All perishable foods should be cooked thoroughly. **No rare meat should be eaten**.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator overnight or quickly in the microwave. DO NOT thaw food on the counter.
- Refrigerate leftovers promptly in airtight containers.
- Use leftovers only if they have been stored properly and have been around for no more than 24 hours.
- Avoid fresh flowers.
- Add margarine, butter, gravy, cheese, and non-fat milk powder to appropriate items. This can be helpful if there are problems with frequent dry mouth.
- When food shopping, avoid salad bars, bulk food bins, food samples, and snacks that are out in the open.
- When dining out:
  - Avoid salad bars, deli's, and buffets.
  - Use single-serve condiments (e.g., ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, soy sauce, steak sauce, salt, pepper, and sugar).

Check with your caregiver after blood work is done to see when this neutropenic/low bacteria diet can be liberalized.

SPECIFIC EXAMPLE GUIDELINES:

FOOD CATEGORY	FOODS RECOMMENDED	FOODS TO AVOID

Beverages	All except those listed	Boiled well water	Bottled spring water and tap water	Raw, unpasteurized milk	Eggnog or milkshakes made with raw eggs	Fresh apple cider
Meat, Fish, Eggs, Poultry	All of the above and shellfish well cooked	Home prepared meat and fish salads	Pre-packaged sandwich meats	Raw or rare Meat, Fish, Eggs, Poultry	Commercially prepared meat and fish salads, sushi	Sandwich meats from the deli
Dairy Products	Pasteurized or lactacid milk or yogurt, pre-packaged ice cream or frozen yogurt	Pre-packaged hard cheeses: cheddar, colby, monterey jack, swiss, mozzarella	Pre-packaged soft cheeses: cottage cheese, cream cheese, ricotta	Soft serve ice cream or frozen yogurt hand-packed ice cream or frozen yogurt	Feta, brie, camembert, blue, gorgonzola, and queso fresco cheeses	Any imported cheeses, and any cheese sliced at a deli
Breads, Cereals, Rice, Potatoes, Pasta	All pre-packaged or homemade breads, muffins. cakes, rolls, donuts, cookies and crackers	All boxed hot or cold cereals (except those with dried fruit or nuts	Cooked potatoes, rice, noodles	Bakery breads, muffins, cakes, donuts, cream or custard filled cakes	Commercially prepared potato or macaroni salad	Popcorn (due to dental problems)
Vegetables and fruits	All well washed and thoroughly cooked vegetables	All cooked or canned fruits	Raw, thick-skinned, well-washed fruits (unbruised): oranges, grapefruits, melons, bananas, tangerines	Raw vegetables and salads	Uncooked thin skinned fruits: apple, peaches, grapes, plums, nectarines, kiwi, strawberries, etc.	Dried fruits
Nuts	Processed peanut butter	Packaged roasted nuts	Cooked nuts (in cookies, cakes, etc)	Raw nuts	Uncooked nuts	Unprocessed nuts
Condiments and Spices	All cooked fresh or canned spices (add at least 5min. prior to end of cooking)	Ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, served in separate containers with clean utensils	Sugar, jelly, honey served from clean containers with clean utensils	Uncooked spices	Raw honey	Anything from a family container that is not freshly washed
Restaurant Foods and Miscellaneous	Thoroughly cooked frozen dinners	Thoroughly cooked frozen pizza	Canned entrees	Do not eat at restaurants for at least two months or use take out deli food even if it's behind the counter	Avoid all salad bars for at least one year	Avoid all self-serve buffets for at least one year

*Ask your caregiver for information/recommendations regarding poor appetite and weight loss during cancer treatment if needed.

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