Neutropenia means that your white blood cell count is low. This can be due to biotherapy, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or your illness. During this time you are much more likely to get an infection. You will need to be more aware of both your health and the things around you.

Some chemotherapy and biotherapy treatments can cause your white blood cell count to be low starting 7 to 10 days after your treatment. Take extra care with these precautions during this time.

**To Help Prevent Infection**
- Avoid people with cold sores, fever blisters, shingles, chicken pox, measles, mumps, cold, or flu.
- Avoid people who have had vaccinations for polio, rubella, mumps, measles, yellow fever, or smallpox in the past few weeks.
- Do not clean birdcages, fish tanks, or cat litter boxes. These carry germs that may make you sick.
- Avoid stagnant water, such as flower vases, denture cups, or drinks that have been sitting out for a long time.
- If you have a long-term catheter, change the dressing as directed. Check the site for signs of infection, which include redness, drainage, swelling, or tenderness.

**Hygiene**
- Wash your hands with warm water and antibacterial soap before eating, preparing food, and after using the toilet. Have anyone caring for you do the same.
- Place bottles of alcohol-based, waterless hand sanitizer throughout your home, and encourage others to use it often.
- Keep fingernails and toenails clean and short. Cut toenails straight across to prevent them from becoming in-grown.
- Keep skin cracks and small cuts clean and covered. Watch for signs of infection.
- Do not use enemas, rectal thermometers, or suppositories.
- Use a stool softener and increase your fluid intake as needed to prevent constipation. Stop taking the stool softener if you develop diarrhea.
- Brush your teeth often with a soft bristle toothbrush. If you have dentures, clean them at least twice a day.
- Replace your toothbrush at least once a month. If replacing your toothbrush monthly is too costly, you can run your current toothbrush through the dishwasher to thoroughly clean it.
Food

- Do not eat fresh fruits and vegetables. You can eat cooked or canned fruits and vegetables. Wash cans before opening.
- Keep raw, cooked, and ready-to-eat foods separated when shopping for, preparing, or storing foods. Place raw meat in plastic bags.
- Refrigerate perishable food promptly and thaw food safely.
- Check expiration dates and discard if past date.
- Clean your hands, utensils, dishes, and food contact surfaces.
- Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat and fish. Cook foods to a safe temperature in order to kill germs.
- Make sure eggs are well cooked before eating. Do not eat raw eggs.
- Use only pasteurized milk and milk products. Avoid soft cheeses that are not pasteurized such as feta, Brie, Camembert, and blue cheese.
- Maintain a well-balanced diet, and drink plenty of fluids. Drink bottled water rather than tap water, if possible. There is no single food or drink that will increase your white blood cell count.

Call your doctor’s office if you have any of these symptoms:

- A temperature by mouth of 100.5° F (38.1° C) or greater.
- Take your temperature twice a day while your white blood cell count is low.
- Do not take any over-the-counter medications that may lower your temperature unless directed to do so by your doctor. This includes aspirin, Tylenol®, Advil®, Nuprin®, Motrin®, and many cold and flu preparations.
- Any signs of infection: redness, heat, swelling, pus, or pain
- Chills or shaking
- Sore throat or mouth, with or without white patches
- Cough, with or without mucous
- Pain or burning when passing urine
- Cloudy or bloody urine, with or without a foul odor

If you have any questions, ask your nurse or call your doctor’s office.