Low White Blood Cell Count (Neutropenia)
Patient Education

White blood cells are made in the bone marrow. These cells are your body's first line of defense in fighting infection. When your white blood cell count is low, there is a greater chance for you to get an infection. Your greatest risk for infection is usually 7 to 14 days after your chemotherapy treatment but varies depending on the type of chemotherapy you receive. Your white blood cell count will usually return to normal approximately 3 weeks after you finish each treatment. **Infection can be life threatening when your white blood cell count is low. Signs of infection or fever must be reported to your doctor right away.** Avoid taking acetaminophen (Tylenol) and aspirin until after talking to your doctor or nurse about your symptoms.

To help prevent infection:

- **Wash your hands frequently, and dry them well,** especially before eating and after using the bathroom and after petting an animal.
- Clean rectal area carefully with soap and water after bowel movements.
- Take a daily shower or bath with soap.
- Brush teeth and keep mouth moist. Check with your cancer doctor before having dental care (teeth cleaning, cavities filled, etc.).
- Avoid sick friends and family (including children). Anyone that has a cold, the flu, chickenpox, etc. could pass this on to you. Also avoid people that have had a live vaccine immunization (measles).
- Do not change animal litter boxes or handle animal feces. It is ok to pet your cat or dog.
- Avoid contact with stagnant water. Do not change water in fish bowls or fish ponds.
- Wear gloves while doing gardening (including repotting indoor plants).
- Wash all fresh fruits/vegetable before eating.
- Prepare all food in a very clean environment and cook foods well.
- Avoid uncooked meat, seafood (sushi, sashimi) and raw eggs.

Watch for the following danger signals and contact your doctor or nurse for:

- Fever greater than 100.4°F or 38°C and/or chills.
- A new cough, sore throat, green/yellow sputum, runny nose or shortness of breath.
- Areas on your skin are red, warm to touch, painful or swollen.
- Redness, discomfort, or drainage at central catheter site.
- Chills or shaking when your central catheter is flushed.
- Burning or pain with urination or frequent urination.
- Diarrhea (more than 4 to 5, above your normal baseline, loose bowel movement a day).