

Tips for Avoiding Infection

1. Wash your hands before meals and after using the bathroom! Use liquid soap and warm water, lather well, and rub all parts of your hands. Make sure that everyone who examines you in the hospital washes his/her hands!
2. Avoid being close to people with colds, or anyone who is sick.
3. Eat a healthy diet – lots of protein and calories.
4. Avoid fresh fruits and vegetables (unless they can be peeled), when your ANC is less than 500.
5. Get plenty of rest.
6. Do not clean any bird cages or cat litter boxes. Animal droppings can be a source of fungal infections.
7. Keep your skin moist with lotion, especially in the cold, to prevent breaks in the skin that could get infected. If cuts do occur, wash them with liquid soap and water, apply anti-bacterial ointment, and cover with a small bandage.
8. Try hard not to bite your nails.
9. Brush your teeth after every meal and at bedtime with a SOFT toothbrush. If you notice any sores or white patches in your mouth or on your lips, report this to your nurse or oncologist. When your ANC is less than 500 and/or your platelets are less than 20,000, daily care should include using a moist gauze or toothette to rub gently over teeth and gums.
10. Call your nurse or oncologist IMMEDIATELY if you develop a fever higher than 100.4° F (38° C), or if you have any signs of an infection such as: redness, swelling, or tenderness in any area of your body.
11. Notify your nurse or oncologist if you have any burning, or itching, when you pee.
12. NEVER use a rectal thermometer or suppositories – they can cause cuts, which can increase your risk for infection and bleeding.
13. Tell your primary doctor to check with your oncologist before giving vaccines to you or to any of your siblings.
14. Don't get any body piercing or tattoos while undergoing treatment.
15. If you are sexually active, you should know that deep kissing can spread infections, and if you have intercourse, you should definitely use "safe sex" rules. Not having sex would be the best, especially if you are in active treatment. You should definitely talk to your oncologist or nurse about what is safe for you!

Don't get discouraged if you follow all these tips and still develop an infection. Your body is very weak after receiving chemo. Most infections in cancer patients occur from the germs within the body when your counts are low. However, it is still really important to follow the tips from the Advisor.