

## **More on NEUTROPENIA & your risk for infection:** *A serious risk for patients on chemotherapy*

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### **What is Neutropenia?**

Neutropenia is a low neutrophil count. Neutrophils are a special type of white blood cells (WBC) that help fight bacterial infections.

### **What causes Neutropenia?**

If you're undergoing treatment with chemotherapy, you're at high risk for becoming "neutropenic" (or having Neutropenia). Chemotherapy works by killing fast-growing cells, like cancer cells, but it also affects other fast growing cells in the body, like white blood cells (including neutrophils). Your white blood cells are very important-- they help keep you healthy and fight off germs (like bacteria). Neutropenia is a common side effect of chemotherapy.

### **When am I at risk for getting an infection?**

You can get an infection at any time; however, when you're on chemotherapy, for a couple of weeks after you've had a treatment, you're at higher risk of becoming neutropenic and getting an infection. During this time, it is hard for your body to fight off germs-- so, if you do get an infection, it can get very serious, or even life-threatening, very quickly. It's best to prevent infections, but if you do get an infection and it's not treated immediately, it can progress and can quickly lead to **sepsis**, which may result in organ failure or even death. *This is why it is extremely important to call your HOA team right away if you're not feeling well.*

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***We take neutropenia & infections very seriously, and you should too.***

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**\* If you're on-treatment and you experience any of the symptoms listed below, you MUST call your HOA doctor RIGHT AWAY. We rely on you to alert us as soon as you're not feeling well so that we can provide you with the best care.**

**\* When you call, you will speak with one of our Triage Registered Nurses who will work with you and your care team to answer your questions and ensure you get the care you need.**

**\* We have SAME-DAY APPOINTMENTS available for patients that need to be seen urgently; therefore, it's very important to call us early in the day!**

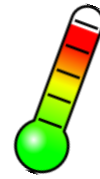
**\* HOA CNY has a Provider available 24 hours a day & 7 days a week to speak with you if you're not feeling well.**

## What can you do to help prevent an infection?



- **Wash your hands frequently!**
  - \* **HAND WASHING is the #1 way to stop the spread of germs & help prevent infection!**
    - *Ask those around you to wash their hands frequently, too*
- *Avoid crowds & avoid people who are sick*
- *Take a shower daily (unless your healthcare provider tells you otherwise)*
- *Use a gentle, unscented lotion to keep your skin moisturized and help prevent dry-skin cracks*
- *Practice good oral hygiene and use an alcohol-free mouthwash or baking soda rinse*
- *Discuss getting the flu shot or other vaccinations with your HOA team*
  - *Always talk to your HOA doctor before getting any vaccine*
- *Thoroughly cook meat & eggs before consumption*
- *Thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables before consumption*
- *Take care and avoid direct contact with pet waste (urine or stool)*
  - *Always wash your hands with soap and water immediately after touching pets or cleaning up after pets*
- *Avoid contact with birds and farm animals while undergoing treatment*
- *Wear gloves when gardening and take extra care to avoid cuts & scrapes*
- *Do not get any body piercings or tattoos while undergoing treatment*

## What are signs & symptoms of an infection?



- *Fever of 100.5°F or higher*
- *Chills or sweats*
- *New or persistent cough, nasal congestion, sinus drainage, sore throat, ear discomfort*
- *Toothache, mouth sores, white patches in the mouth or white coating on the tongue, red or inflamed areas in the mouth*
- *Increased fatigue & weakness, difficulty waking up*
- *New rash, redness, warmth or swelling of the skin*
- *Slow healing wound or surgical incision; drainage, redness or increased soreness around a wound*
- *Burning or pain with urination, urinary frequency*
- *Redness, itching, tearing or drainage from your eyes*
- *Diarrhea (must call if not controlled with Imodium or if you experience more than 4 to 6 episodes in a day)*
- *Any redness, warmth, swelling, tenderness or drainage around a central venous catheter (such as a PICC line or a PORT)*

**You MUST report these signs/symptoms to your HOA team RIGHT AWAY!**

## Special Considerations & Preventative Measures:

**Visitors** While on treatment, you should stay away from people that are sick. People with colds, the flu or other contagious diseases should not visit you. You should also avoid people who have had live vaccinations – please contact HOA to further discuss with your team if you have any questions about vaccinations. Be sure to inform your HOA Care team if you've been in contact with someone that has a contagious disease or who has recently had a live vaccination.

**Crowds** When your white blood cell count is low, you should avoid crowds. You should also carry a few masks with you so that you can wear one to help protect yourself if you cannot avoid a crowded area. You do not need to wear a mask outdoors.

**Mouth Care** Good mouth care is very important. You should brush your teeth gently but thoroughly with a soft-bristled brush, at least twice daily. Keep your toothbrush clean and replace it frequently. Do not use alcohol-containing mouthwashes; you may

use a salt water or baking soda rinse if you wish. If you wear dentures, clean them daily. Keep your lips moist to prevent cracking. Check with your HOA team before scheduling any dental work (and tell your dentist that you're currently getting chemotherapy treatment). *It's important to report any dryness, soreness or burning in your mouth to your HOA team right away.*

**Skin Care** Your skin is your first line of defense and helps keep germs from entering your body! To help keep your skin healthy, you should: shower daily using a mild soap, use a mild lotion to keep your skin moisturized, cleanse any cuts or scrapes with soap & water and keep them clean, wear socks / shoes (don't walk barefoot), wash your hands frequently, avoid nail salons, file your nails rather than cutting them, and use an electric razor when shaving. *It's important to report any swelling, sores, drainage, redness/warmth, pain or tenderness to your HOA team right away.*

**Respiratory (Lung) Infections** It is easier to get respiratory infections when you're receiving chemotherapy. You can help prevent an infection by avoiding the following: dusty / musty areas such as basements and attics, smoking and places with cigarette smoke, crowded areas, grooming pets (also, do not clean litter boxes, bird cages or fish tanks), try to avoid long periods of bed-rest if possible, avoid hot & humid environments, and humidifiers should be cleaned and replenished with fresh, clean water daily. *It's important to report any shortness of breath, new cough, chest pain or back pain to your HOA team right away.*

**Genitourinary Care** You're also at higher risk of getting urinary tract infections (UTI) while on chemotherapy. Things you can do to help prevent a UTI include: drinking plenty of fluids, emptying your bladder frequently, practicing good bathroom hygiene (after a bowel movement, it is best to cleanse gently with soap and water, and women should cleanse from front-to-back). The rectal area also contains many germs. Constipation can result in straining to have a bowel movement, and this increases the risk of tears or hemorrhoid irritation. Increasing the fiber in your diet and staying hydrated with clear liquids can help prevent constipation. While on chemotherapy treatment, do not take rectal temperatures, and for women, it's advised that you use sanitary pads rather than tampons during menstruation. *It's important to report any painful or frequent urination, blood in the urine or stool, lower back or abdominal pain, or any pain, burning or itching in the rectal area to your HOA team right away.*

**Sexual Intercourse (during treatment)** During periods of neutropenia, sexual intercourse is not advised. Consult with your HOA Doctor or Nurse for further advisement. If it is safe to have intercourse, it is best to use a water-soluble lubricant such as K-Y Jelly. You should urinate after intercourse to decrease the risk of urinary tract infections. A condom should be used. *It's important that both men & women report any signs of infection, such as: discharge, itching, odor, bleeding or pain during intercourse right away.*

**Remember, we're in it together.  
When in doubt, call HOA... We're here to help!**