

# Managing Neutropenia for Pediatric Patients

This information explains what neutropenia (new-tro-PEE-nia) is. It also explains how to manage neutropenia after you leave the hospital. In this resource, the words “you” and “your” mean you or your child.

## About neutropenia

Neutropenia is when you have a low number of neutrophils (a type of white blood cell) in your blood. It’s common to have neutropenia after certain types of cancer treatments.

These neutrophils help your body fight infection. When you have neutropenia, you have a higher risk of getting an infection. A fever of 100.4 °F (38.0 °C) or higher is usually the first sign of an infection.

To learn more about neutropenia and how to manage it, read *Neutropenia (Low White Blood Cell Count)* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/neutropenia](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/neutropenia)). For food safety guidelines to follow when you have neutropenia, read *Food Safety During Cancer Treatment*

([www.mskcc.org/pe/food-safety](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/food-safety)).

## **Leaving the hospital**

At the hospital, your healthcare provider gave you intravenous (IV, through a vein) antibiotics (medicine to treat and prevent infection) and a blood test. Your blood test showed that you don't have an infection. You also haven't had a fever in at least 24 hours. This means that it's safe for you to leave the hospital and manage your neutropenia on your own.

### **Take your antibiotics**

Before you leave the hospital, your healthcare provider will give you a prescription for oral antibiotics (antibiotics that you swallow), IV antibiotics, or both. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for how to take your antibiotics. If you can't take them for any reason or forget to take them, call your healthcare provider right away. After 5 p.m., during the weekend, and on holidays, call 212-639-7900. Ask for the doctor covering for your doctor.

### **Get blood tests**

When you leave the hospital, you'll need to have a blood test, called a complete blood count (CBC), every day or every other day. This is to check your absolute neutrophil count (ANC). When your neutrophil count is 500 or higher, you'll go back to your regular schedule of blood tests

based on your healthcare provider's recommendations. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for how often to get your blood tests.

### **Check your temperature**

When you leave the hospital, check your temperature if you feel warm, have shaking chills, or aren't feeling well. If your temperature is 100.4° F (38° C) or higher, call your healthcare provider right away. After 5 p.m., during the weekend, and on holidays, call 212-639-7900. Ask for the doctor covering for your doctor. You may need to go back to the hospital.

### **Look out for signs of infection**

You'll also need to check for other signs of infection. Call your healthcare provider right away if you have any of these signs:

- Fatigue (feeling more tired or weak than usual)
- Shaking chills
- Body aches
- Sweats
- Cough
- Trouble breathing or feel short of breath
- Redness, swelling, or warmth on an injury or incision (surgical cut)

- Redness, swelling, or warmth around your central line
- Pain in your abdomen (belly)
- Nausea and vomiting (throwing up) that isn't getting better
- Mouth sores
- Diarrhea (loose or watery bowel movements)
- Pain when having a bowel movement (pooping)
- Feeling dizzy, confused, or weak
- Pain or burning when urinating (peeing)

If you have any of these signs, or if you have any new symptoms not listed here, call your healthcare team right away. After 5 p.m., during the weekend, and on holidays, call 212-639-7900. Ask for the doctor covering for your doctor.

## How to prevent infection

Here are some ways you can prevent infection:

- Shower with a 4% chlorhexidine gluconate (CHG) solution antiseptic skin cleaner (such as Hibiclens®). Rub the 4% CHG solution gently over your body from your neck to your feet. Don't put it on your face or genital area. To learn more about showering with Hibiclens, read *How to Shower Using 4% Chlorhexidine Gluconate (CHG)*

*Solution Antiseptic Skin Cleanser*  
([www.mskcc.org/pe/chg-solution](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/chg-solution)).

- If you have a central venous catheter (CVC), talk with your healthcare provider before showering. To learn more, watch *Showering While You Have a Central Venous Catheter (CVC)* ([www.mskcc.org/pe/shower-cvc](http://www.mskcc.org/pe/shower-cvc)).
- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer (such as Purell®) after shaking hands and after contact with young children.
- Brush your teeth after each meal. Use an ultra-soft toothbrush.
- Avoid having visitors who have a cold or recently had an infection.
- Wear a mask when you go out in public places or crowded areas to help protect you from catching a cold.
- Don't share your forks, spoons, cups, or anything else you use to eat or drink.

## **Follow-up appointments**

You'll have your first follow-up appointment 1 to 2 days after you leave the hospital. Your appointment will be scheduled for you. You may need to see your healthcare

provider every day or every other day until your neutrophil count is 500 or higher. Your healthcare provider will let you know how often you'll need to see them.

## Contact information

If you have any questions or concerns, call your care team. You can reach them Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. After 5 p.m., during the weekend, and on holidays, call 212-639-7900. Ask for the doctor covering for your doctor.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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Managing Neutropenia for Pediatric Patients - Last updated on October 1, 2024

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