

Neutropenia and Safe Food Handling

What is neutropenia?

Neutropenia is a decrease in the number of white blood cells. These cells are the body's main defense against infection. Neutropenia is common after receiving chemotherapy and increases your risk for infections.

How can I prevent neutropenia?

There is not much you can do to prevent neutropenia from occurring, but you can decrease your risk for getting an infection while your white blood cell count is low.

How can I to prevent an infection?

Safe food handling is important if your body's immune system is not working well because you are at higher risk for foodborne illnesses. Following these food safety tips will decrease your risk of infection from food.

Do's

- Wash hands using soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after preparing food and before eating.
- Sanitize all food preparation areas including cutting boards with hot, soapy water.
- Wash all food contact surfaces and utensils before and after use.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs away from each other and away from other foods.
- Use separate cutting boards for raw meats/fish and fruits and vegetables.
- Clean lids of cans before opening. Wash can opener after each use.
- Wash all fresh fruits and vegetables before eating. Rinse fruits and vegetables thoroughly and rub firm-skin fruits and vegetables under running tap water. Consider purchasing a cleaning brush from the grocery store.
- Cut away damaged or bruised areas on produce after cleaning.
- Wash thick skinned produce before cutting open (melons, avocados, pineapple, etc.)
- Thaw frozen meats/fish in the refrigerator or microwave. Avoid thawing on the counter at room temperature.
- Use a cooking thermometer to ensure food is cooked to a safe temperature.
 - Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb: 145°F with a 3 minute rest time
 - Ground Meat: 160°F
 - Poultry (ground, parts, whole and stuffing): 165°F
 - Eggs, Egg Dishes: 160°F
 - Fin Fish: 145°F, or flesh is opaque and separates easily with a fork
 - Leftovers and Casseroles: 165°F
- Keep hot foods at or above 140°F and cold foods at or below 40°F (0°F for frozen foods).

Don'ts

- Do not consume foods that have been left out at room temperature for longer than 2 hours. When the air temperature is 90°F or hotter, do not consume foods that have been left out for longer than 1 hour.
- Do not eat leftovers that are older than 3 days.
- Do not eat foods that appear or you suspect to be spoiled.
- Do not eat raw or undercooked meats/fish/eggs/shellfish.
- Do not eat foods past their expiration date.
- Do not eat at buffets, salad bars, self-service restaurants, or from communal dishes (peanut bowl others put hands into, pot luck dishes). Food may not have been held at the correct temperatures.
- Do not use bulk bins at grocery stores.

References

<https://www.fda.gov/food/buy-store-serve-safe-food/safe-food-handling>