

DIET GUIDELINES FOR LOW WHITE BLOOD CELLS

When your physician orders a neutropenic diet for you due to a low white blood cell count, positive steps towards good health include:

- Avoid most fresh/uncooked fruits and vegetables.
Note: exceptions include foods with thick skins that can be thoroughly washed and then peeled, such as bananas, oranges and grapefruit.
- Thoroughly cook all foods.
- Eat three, well-balanced meals each day with snacks between meals, if desired.

Some foods naturally contain increased amounts of bacteria, including fresh fruits and vegetables. This is typically not a problem for healthy individuals. However, during the time when you are highly susceptible to infection, it is important to follow some dietary guidelines to reduce your exposure to potentially harmful foods.

Cooked Foods

- Eat only well-cooked foods (e.g., well-done steak).
- After preparation, food should be eaten as soon as possible.
- Do not eat potentially perishable foods that have been left at room temperature for more than one hour.
- Avoid salads containing mayonnaise unless they are eaten immediately after preparation. Do not save to eat later.

Dairy Products

- Use dairy products that are packaged individually. After opening, consume at one meal and never save for later.
- Do not use products that are near or past the expiration date.
- Avoid milkshakes brought in from home or restaurants.

- Use commercial milkshakes or supplements in sealed individual cartons. Do not use if there is a break in the container.
- Use fresh, pasteurized dairy products only.

Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

- Avoid fresh or uncooked fruits and vegetables, including salad and foods with garnishes.
- Do not use beverages prepared with freshly squeezed juices or uncooked vegetable juice.
- Thick-skinned fruits, such as oranges, bananas and melons, can be eaten if washed thoroughly by using a weak alcohol solution before peeling the fruit.

Leftovers

- Seal and wrap leftovers.
- Label with the date and time of preparation.
- Store in refrigerator or freezer immediately.
- Do not eat if stored in the refrigerator for more than 24 hours.
- Consume frozen food as soon as possible — avoid thawing at room temperature.

Oral Hygiene/Miscellaneous

- Use a Toothette® instead of toothbrush if pain or bleeding occurs in the gums.
- Do not floss.
- Follow the oral care hygiene instructions of your nurse.
- Use medications as ordered by your physician.

For More Information

Ask for the inpatient or outpatient dietitian.