

Fall in white blood cell count (neutropenia)

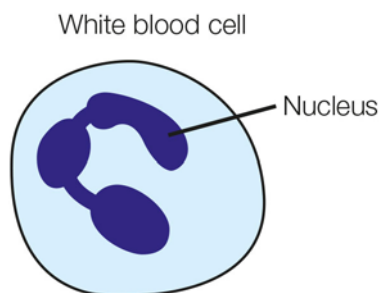
(La baisse des globules blancs (neutropénie))

Chemotherapy drugs often have **secondary effects affecting the blood and bone marrow***

They may lead to a **temporary fall in the white blood cell count** and particularly some of them known as segmented neutrophils: this is known as **neutropenia**.

A simultaneous fall in all three types of blood cells (white cells, red cells and platelets) is called **aplasia**.

The role of white cells is to protect the body against microbes, so their diminution **leads to a risk of infection**.



Neutropenia usually occurs during the second week of a chemotherapy cycle.

The number of white cells increases spectacularly, usually in less than 2 weeks.

Before each course of chemotherapy, a full blood count** is used to check white cell levels. Below a certain threshold, the chemotherapy session may be postponed or cancelled and the doses administered in the following sessions may be reduced.

To slow the fall of the white blood cell count, the doctor can prescribe injections of specific growth factors called G-CSF to stimulate the blood marrow to produce more white cells.

Generally, **neutropenia remains compatible with normal life**. You can continue your daily and social activities, following a few simple rules.

In any case, the advice given below can help you avoid infection:

- **Avoid meeting people suffering from a contagious infectious disease** (cold, 'flu, German measles, herpes, etc.)
- **Limit your use of public transport, swimming pool, communal baths;**
- **Limit work** which raises dust;
- **Avoid certain foods** such as seafood, raw milk, raw milk cheese, hard-boiled eggs, cooked meat sold sliced, commercial cream pastries, raw, unpeeled fruit and vegetables.

**Bone marrow is the tissue found inside bones and the site of production of red blood cells, white cells and platelets.*

***A full blood count is an examination of a blood sample, which aims to count the different blood components: red cells, white cells and platelets, in order to determine whether they are present in adequate numbers.*

| Authorised foods | Foods to eliminate |
|--|---|
| Sterilized long-life milk Fresh cheese individually wrapped (such as cream of gruyere, etc.) Gelified milk Long-life yogurt | All other cheeses, yogurts, "petits suisses", fromage blanc Other milk desserts: confectioner's cream, chocolate mousse, etc. |
| Preserved prepared dishes e.g. ravioli, cassoulet | Insufficiently cooked, rare meat Cooked meats, ham Tongue, offal, eggs Prepared dishes (e.g. cheese in pastry, shepherd's pie, etc.) Oysters, mussels and other shellfish Raw fish |
| Cooked green vegetables, preserved raw food Washed, peeled fruit Fruit in syrup, preserved fruit puree (little pots and tubs, etc.) | Raw green vegetables Fresh fruit not peeled |
| | Mayonnaise |
| Grains Biscuits in individual sachets Plain pastries (croissants, brioches, etc.) Pastries without cream Industrial sorbets Bars of chocolate Chocolates (mint, praline, cream) Individually wrapped sweets | All other biscuits All other cakes and pastries Ices, ice-cream Stuffed chocolates |
| Fizzy drinks individually packaged | |

- **Cook meat and fish adequately;**
- **Limit sources of infection** (domestic animals and their excrement, handling cut flowers);
- **Wrap up well** when you go out (in cold weather);
- **Maintain your usual rules of hygiene;**
 - wash your hands several times a day after going to the toilet and before meals
 - have a daily shower and change your underclothes every day
 - dental hygiene: brush your teeth after every meal with a soft toothbrush and fluorinated toothpaste (the toothbrush must be changed every month);
- **Avoid small skin injuries** (when gardening, cutting your nails or shaving – use an electric razor). If it should happen, disinfect it well.

In the event of a fever of more than 38°C and/or if you feel the following symptoms (shivering, diarrhoea, severe vomiting, breathlessness, faintness), see doctor immediately.