

IMMUNE SYSTEM SUPPORTIVE EATING

BOOSTING YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM DURING TREATMENT

Low white blood cell counts (WBCs) are not uncommon to experience during various cancer therapies. While low WBCs usually resolve after cancer therapy, the time it takes for WBCs to return to normal levels can vary.

It is important to practice good hygiene, hand-washing, and food safety practices, especially if your WBCs are low. Neutrophils are a type of white blood cell that fights off infections. It is especially important to practice good hygiene if you are experiencing low levels of neutrophils, as this means a person is more susceptible to infections.

PROTEIN & IMMUNITY

Cells need protein to grow and repair. Lack of vitamins, minerals, calories, and protein can all weaken the immune system and increase infection risk. Individuals with cancer often need extra calories and protein, in particular, to support health and immune function. Quality protein is important for those in treatment. Our bodies need amino acids from proteins we eat to make new WBCs. High quality animal and plant-based protein sources include: animal meats, dairy products, beans, legumes, peas, soy products, nuts, and seeds.

BALANCED NUTRITION TIPS

- Try new foods. Variety in meals can boost nutrition and adapt your diet to any taste changes that may occur during treatment
- Plant-based foods. Try eating beans and peas instead of meat a few times each week
- Eat at least 2 ½ cups of fruits and veggies per day. Colorful veggies and fruits have many health-promoting compounds
- Try to maintain weight and stay physically active during the course of treatment

References:

1. <https://www.oncolynutrition.org/erfc/eating-well-when-unwell/white-blood-count-diet/>
2. <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition/nutrition-during-treatment/once-treatment-starts.html>
3. <https://www.fda.gov/downloads/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/UCM312761.pdf>
4. <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/staying-active/nutrition/nutrition-during-treatment/weak-immune-system.html>

IMMUNE SUPPORTIVE TIPS

- Wash hands and surfaces often
- Use anti-bacterial soap and warm water. Scrub hands for 15-30 seconds several times per day and every time prior to food preparation
- Wash cutting boards/dishes/utensils/counter tops with hot soapy water. Sanitize cutting boards and countertops by rinsing them in a solution (1 tbsp unscented chlorine bleach per gallon of water) or run the plastic board through dishwasher
- Consider using one cutting board for raw foods and another for ready-to-eat foods, such as bread, fresh fruits and vegetables, and cooked meat.
- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs from other foods in your grocery shopping cart, grocery bags, and in your refrigerator.
- Keep hot foods at (>140°F) and cold foods at (<40°F)
- Avoid raw meat, eggs and fish
- Avoid unwashed, moldy or expired food
- Avoid unpasteurized beverages: includes fruit/vegetable juice, beer, milk, and honey
- **DO EAT FRESH FRUITS & VEGGIES:** Rinse fruits and vegetables, and rub firm-skin fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten.
- When in doubt, throw it out – if you are unsure of safety of food in your refrigerator don't take the risk



"Is it *done* yet?"

You can't tell by looking. Use a food thermometer to be sure.

USDA Recommended Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures

145°F

with a 3-minute rest time



Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb
Steaks, Roasts & Chops

145°F



Fish

160°F



Beef, Pork, Veal & Lamb
Ground

160°F



Egg Dishes

165°F



Turkey, Chicken & Duck
Whole, Pieces & Ground

www.FoodSafety.gov

USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline
1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

Food Safety and Inspection Service



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