Neutropenia/Febrile Neutropenia

Side Effects – Symptoms & Solutions

Whidbey General Hospital

Neutropenia/Febrile neutropenia

Most chemotherapies reduce your number of germ-fighting white blood cells (WBCs), which increases your chance of getting an infection. When the number of a particular type of WBC, called a neutrophil (NEW-tro-fil), falls below normal, it is called neutropenia (NEW-tro-PEEN-ee-ah). If you have neutropenia and a fever above 100.5°F (38°C), you have a condition called febrile (FEH-bry-ul) neutropenia, and it may mean you have an infection. If this occurs, you should alert your doctor or nurse right away.

How do I know if I have neutropenia?

Ask your doctor or nurse to check your latest blood test. If it includes a test called a "differential," they will be able to calculate your neutrophil count and tell you if it is below normal.

How do I know my risk of getting an infection?

After the results from each blood test, ask your doctor or nurse to calculate your "absolute neutrophil count" (ANC) and compare it with the table below.

ANC (Neutrophils/microL)	Risk for Infection
1,500 – 2,000	No increased risk
1,000 – 1,500	Slightly increased risk
500 – 1,000	Moderately increased risk
Less than 500	Severely increased risk

How do I know my risk of getting an infection? (continued)

There are medications that increase the number of neutrophils and decrease your risk of infection. Ask your doctor if these might be appropriate for you.

Call your doctor or nurse right away if you have symptoms of an infection, such as:

- A fever above 100.5°F (38°C), chills, or sweating
  - Note: do not take any medication to lower a fever without your doctor's approval.
- Loose bowel movements (for example, diarrhea); changes in urination; or vaginal itching or discharge that is unusual.
- Severe cough, sore throat, sinus pain/pressure, earache, headache, or stiff neck.
- Swelling, tenderness, or blisters/sores on your mouth, lips, or skin.

The information contained herein is not comprehensive and is intended only as a guide.

Instructions from your physician and nurse: