

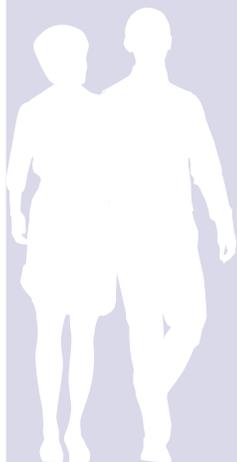
Managing side effects: Reducing your RISK OF INFECTION

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

You or your loved one has been diagnosed with a type of blood cancer. One side effect may be a higher risk of getting an infection. What does it mean and how will it affect you?

This fact sheet will help you:

- Learn about infections
- Understand the signs of an infection
- Find out what you can do to prevent an infection



What is an infection?

People who are having certain cancer treatments (especially chemotherapy) have a higher risk of getting an infection. This is because the treatment weakens your immune system by lowering the number of white blood cells in your body. White blood cells fight infections.

About infections

- Infections happen when germs enter your body and your immune system does not destroy them quickly.
- Germs can be bacteria, viruses, fungi, or other micro-organisms.
- Infections can begin anywhere in your body, multiply, and then spread.
- When your body's immune system is strong, it can often fight the germs and stop the infection.
- When your immune system is weaker from cancer and treatment, you may be unable to fight the infection. These infections can be serious and hard to treat. In severe cases, infections can lead to death.

Signs of infection

Report any signs of infection to your doctor right away, such as:

- A temperature of 38°C (100.4°F) or higher
- Chills or sweating
- Diarrhea
- A burning feeling when you urinate
- Ongoing cough or sore throat
- Odd vaginal discharge or itching
- Redness, swelling, heat, or tenderness around an injury, sore, pimple, intravenous (IV) site, or vascular access device
- Pain in your abdomen
- Bleeding gums or white patches in your mouth

Contact your healthcare team right away if you suspect an infection.





Tips for preventing infections

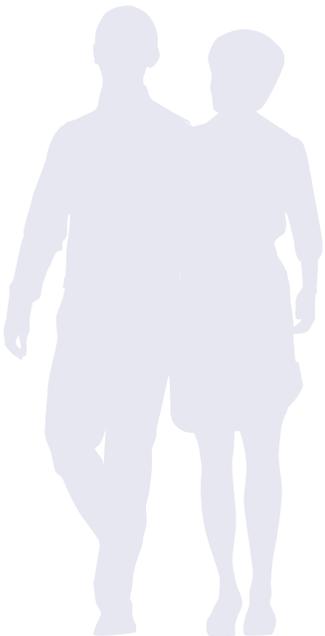
It's important to take steps to reduce your risk of infection during and after cancer treatment. Here are some ways to help prevent infections.

Practice good hygiene

- Wash your hands often and well with soap and water. Always wash before eating or after using the bathroom.
- Take a warm (not hot) bath or shower every day.
- Do not rub your skin to dry it; pat it dry instead.
- Use unscented lotion, oil, or lip balm to prevent and heal dry, cracked skin.
- Keep your nails short and dry. Do not bite your nails or pick at your cuticles.
- Avoid manicures, pedicures, and artificial nails.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor to prevent cuts.
- Use an extra-soft toothbrush to clean your teeth and gums.
- If you have a port or catheter, clean and care for it by following your healthcare team's instructions.
- Clean yourself well after each bowel movement. Ask for medical advice if irritation or hemorrhoids are a problem.
- Check with your healthcare team before using enemas or suppositories.

Prevent illness and injury

- Ask your doctor if it is safe to take acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) to manage a fever.
- Avoid crowds. If you go out, wear a mask, especially in doctors' waiting rooms.
- Avoid anyone who has a cold, flu, measles, or chicken pox.
- Check with your doctor before getting any vaccinations.
- Find out if you should avoid people who have recently received immunizations with "live attenuated" organisms or viruses.
- Wear gloves when gardening or cleaning up around your home.
- Avoid activities that put you at risk for cuts, burns, or other injuries.
- Clean cuts and scrapes right away. Rinse wounds under running water.
- Talk to your healthcare team about your pets. Pets in good health can usually stay by your side during cancer treatment.
 - You may need to take extra precautions, like asking someone else to clean a cat's litter box or handle animal waste.
 - Do not adopt new pets.
 - Avoid reptiles, chickens, ducks, and rodents, which can carry salmonella and other germs.



Practice food safety

- Wash your hands well before and after handling food.
- Disinfect all food preparation surfaces before and after cooking.
- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water before peeling or cutting them. Scrub firm produce like melons with a clean brush. Dry them with a clean towel.
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate. Wash utensils, cutting boards, and dishes well if they have been touched by raw meat or eggs.
- Use a meat thermometer to make sure all meats are cooked to a safe internal temperature before you eat them.
- Always store fresh food within 1 hour of purchasing or cooking it—or as soon as possible.
- Check the expiration dates on all foods. Discard leftovers or opened packages within 1 to 4 days. If you are not sure if something is safe to eat, throw it out.
- Be careful when eating at restaurants and shopping for food. Avoid food buffets and salad bars.
- Avoid foods that can carry foodborne illness. These include:
 - Unpasteurized drinks and cheeses
 - Raw food, such as sushi
 - Prepared foods at grocery or convenience stores
 - Unwashed fresh fruits and vegetables
 - Foods that contain raw eggs, like cookie dough
 - Water from a well, unless it has been tested and/or boiled



This fact sheet was reviewed by:

Karine Bilodeau, inf., Ph.D. CSIO(C)
Assistant Professor
Faculty of Nursing
Montreal University



LEUKEMIA &
LYMPHOMA
SOCIETY
OF CANADA*

Never hesitate to contact us, we're here to help!

1 833 222-4884 • info@bloodcancers.ca • bloodcancers.ca