MANAGING CHEMOTHERAPY SIDE EFFECTS: 
LOW WHITE BLOOD CELL COUNT

WHAT ARE WHITE BLOOD CELLS?
White blood cells are part of your immune system. The immune system prevents and fights infections. Certain chemotherapy drugs and radiation therapy can lower the white blood cell count. Some diseases that involve the bone marrow, where white blood cells are made, can also cause white blood cells to decrease.

WHAT DOES A LOW WHITE BLOOD CELL COUNT MEAN?
Without enough white blood cells, the body can no longer protect itself from infection. The longer a person’s white blood cell count remains low, the greater the risk for infection.

WHAT CAN I DO?

REDUCE EXPOSURE TO NEW GERMS:
• Avoid crowds and people with infections
• Wash hands carefully and frequently with antibacterial soap, especially after using the bathroom and before eating.
• Ask those who examine and care for you to wash their hands carefully.
• Cook food thoroughly and wash all fruit and vegetables well.
• Do not drink water or liquids which have been “standing” at room temperature for more than four hours.
• Do not have sexual intercourse if your doctor or nurse tells you your white blood cells count is lower than 500.
• Do not smoke since it can increase your risk for lung infections

PROTECT AND CLEAN YOUR SKIN:
• Avoid pressure which can lead to breakdown of tissue: back, elbows, and heels are high risk areas
• Keep the areas where skin touches skin clean and dry – such as under your arms, groin, and under your breasts.
• Avoid “cuts” on skin, and clean any present cuts well with soap and water daily.
• Use only an electric razor when shaving.

PROTECT AND CLEAN LINING OF MOUTH AND RECTAL AREA
• Brush teeth carefully and gently, with a soft toothbrush when getting up, after each meal and at bedtime. Change your toothbrush every few months.
• Floss gently each day with un-waxed dental floss.
• Cleanse rectal area carefully after each bowel movement and consider use of baby wipes.
• Never put anything in your rectum (enema, suppository, thermometer)
• Avoid diarrhea or constipation.
• Eat well and drink plenty of fluids.

**WHEN SHOULD I CALL THE DOCTOR OR NURSE?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temperature 100.4°F or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Changes in the mouth: red or painful areas, white or yellow patches, swelling of gums or tongue, coating on tongue, raspy voice, difficulty swallowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in rectal area: pain, swelling of hemorrhoids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diarrhea or constipation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaginal discharge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes on skin: open, red or painful areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough or change in sputum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes in breathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes with urination: pain, burning, increased frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaking chill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DO NOT TAKE PRODUCTS WITH ASPIRIN OR TYLENOL® BEFORE TALKING TO YOUR DOCTOR OR NURSE.**

**DO NOT MAKE DENTAL APPOINTMENT UNTIL SPEAKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR OR NURSE.**