

Food safety advice if you have a low white blood cell count (Neutropenia)

Nutrition and Dietetic Service

Information for Adult Patients

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What is a low white blood cell count?

Neutrophils are a type of white blood cell. They circulate in the blood and help fight infection. A low white blood cell or neutropenia, is when the number of neutrophils in the blood is too low, that is below $1.5 \times 10^9/l$. If your blood test shows a low count, you are at a higher risk of getting infections. This can happen during illness, after a transplant, or if you take medications that weaken your immune system. This will make it harder for your body to fight infections. It is important to avoid foods that may carry germs and to practice good food hygiene.

The advice in this booklet will help lower this risk while still letting you have a varied diet and maintain your weight.

You only need to follow this diet while you are neutropenic or until your medical team say it is safe to eat these foods again.

Shopping for food

- Check 'use by' and 'best before' dates on food
- Avoid buying products in damaged packaging or dented tins
- Cover all food to avoid contamination. Avoid buffets and self-serving food
- Keep raw meat and ready-to-eat products separate
- Buy chilled and frozen foods last when shopping. Use a cool bag if possible to keep them cold or frozen. Do not let food defrost unless you're using it straight away.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Storing food

- Refrigerator temperature should be between 0C and 5C. Keep your freezer temperature below –18C. Make sure food is frozen solid when it is removed from the freezer
- Avoid contact between ready to eat/ cooked and raw foods or unwashed vegetables. Uncovered raw meat or defrosting foods can contaminate other foods with bacteria. Store raw and defrosting meat/fish at the bottom of the fridge in a covered container to stop drips. Never re-freeze thawed food
- Do not overfill the fridge or freezer . It will raise the temperature causing food to thaw

Preparing food and avoiding cross-contamination

- Wash hands thoroughly with warm water and soap. Cover cuts with a waterproof plaster before and after handling food. This is important for anyone preparing your meals.
- Remove jewellery when preparing food, especially rings and watches.
- Use disposable dish cloths or wash cloths in the washing machine on a hot wash cycle daily. Avoid using sponges as these are hard to clean.
- Disinfect worktops often, especially after preparing raw meat, poultry or unwashed vegetables.
- Use separate utensils for raw and ready to eat/ cooked foods, for example use a separate board, knife and utensils for raw meats. Plastic chopping boards are the cleanest. Make sure they are washed and disinfected after each use. Replace them regularly.
- Do not wash raw meat or poultry before cooking as cooking will kill any harmful bacteria. Washing could splash harmful germs onto work surfaces.
- Wash fruit and vegetables before eating.
- Wipe the tops of all cans and bottles before opening.
- Keep pets and litter trays out of the kitchen. Wash hands after contact with pets, litter trays or animal treats made from dried meat.

Cooking food


- Thaw meat and poultry in a fridge, not at room temperature as bacteria grow quickly at room temperature.
- Make sure food is thoroughly cooked. The temperature in the middle of the food should be above 75°C. You could use a cooking thermometer if you want to check this or make sure it is piping hot.
- Cool cooked food as quickly as possible (within 1 to 2 hours) at room temperature and then chill or freeze it. Store leftovers in multiple shallow containers to help them cool faster.
- Do not put hot food in the fridge as it will raise the temperature of all the food in the fridge.

- Eat reheated food within 24 hours of preparing or defrosting it. Make sure that it is served piping hot. Do not reheat it more than once.
- Rice must be served hot and eaten right away after it is first cooked. It must not be reheated. The same applies for takeaways or restaurants. It is better to prepare rice at home when ordering a takeaway.

Eating out

- Make sure all meat at a barbeque or picnic is well cooked. Keep it separate from raw foods. Make sure all food is covered and eaten quickly to avoid spreading germs from one food to another.
- If eating out, make sure the area where you are sitting is clean and tidy. Avoid food at buffets or self service restaurants. You may be advised to not eat out to reduce the risk of infection from other people.
- To check the hygiene rating of a restaurant, take away or food shop a useful website is <https://ratings.food.gov.uk/>

During your hospital stay

- Inpatients who chose to visit the restaurant and other food outlets on the hospital site should also follow these guidelines. This includes inpatients with a dietetic restaurant pass.
- The inpatient menu will be highlighted with this symbol for all neutropenic options 
- If you have bought snacks or food from home please talk with your nurse. They can tell you what is safe to bring to the ward and what foods to avoid (see the next page)

Water

- If you use a filter system at home, it is important to follow the manufacturer's advice on regular cleaning and filter changes.
- When travelling abroad it may be safer to drink bottled water. Ice in drinks should be avoided.

	Foods allowed	Foods to avoid
Dairy products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All hard pasteurised cheeses (for example. cheddar) • Soft pasteurised cheeses without rind (for example, mozzarella, feta, paneer, cream cheese, ricotta, halloumi, goats cheese) • All cheese that is cooked until steaming hot. • All pasteurised milk, yoghurt, cream and ice cream • All plant based milks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mould ripened soft cheeses (for example, brie) • Soft blue cheeses (for example, gorgonzola, Roquefort) • Cheese/ dairy uncovered at a buffet or deli • Unpasteurised milks and food made from Unpasteurised milk (for example, unpasteurised goats cheese) • Probiotic products (for example. Kefir, Yakult, Actimel) • Soft serve ice cream
Meat, poultry, fish and eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meat, poultry that is cooked all the way through with no trace of blood or pink colour. • Pasteurised egg products (for example, shop bought mayonnaise that use British Lion eggs) • Eggs that have been cooked all the way though such as hard boiled eggs or scrambled eggs. • Well cooked fish shellfish and crustaceans that are cooked all the way through • Pre-packaged cooked meats (for example, ham) • Pasteurised pate in a jar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish shellfish. • Raw or undercooked eggs from any egg source. • Any product using raw eggs that is not fully cooked • Cured or smoked foods (for example, smoked salmon, salami-unless cooked) • Sushi • Unpasteurised pate
Fruit and vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure all fruit and vegetables and salad are washed properly (including pre-packaged ready washed salad). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damaged or bruised fruit and vegetables. • Raw, sprouted seeds.

	Foods allowed	Foods to avoid
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black pepper, herbs and spices in sealed jars. All sealed packets (for example. cereals, dried nuts, fruits, biscuits). Pasteurised or heat treated honey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Black pepper, herbs and spices bought loose from the deli/ farm shops Buffet style foods, refill or very large packets. Raw honey and honeycomb (unless cooked)

Contact details

Dietitian: _____

Telephone number: _____

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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

Previous reference:

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