

Low Blood Counts

One of our most important goals at Moffitt Cancer Center is to provide you with quality patient care through education, research and service. The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with information about the major types of blood cells, their job in the body, and what you need to do to protect yourself when these blood cells are decreased. Please read through the pamphlet and write down any questions you may have. Your nurse or doctor will review this information with you and answer any questions that you may have.

Your blood contains several different types of cells, each with a different job. Because all of these cells are made by your bone marrow, and because chemotherapy affects bone marrow, patients who receive chemotherapy are likely to have decreased blood counts at some point during their treatment.

What types of blood cells do I have?

You have three major types of blood cells. They are red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets.

What is each of their jobs?

The main job of your **white blood cells** is to fight infection. When you have a low white blood cell count, you are at a higher risk for developing an infection.

The main job of your **red blood cells** is to carry oxygen to the tissues in your body. When you have a low red blood cell count, you are likely to experience fatigue.

The main job of your **platelets** is to help your blood clot. When you have a low platelet count, you will be at greater risk for bleeding.

What should I do when I have low blood counts?

When you are experiencing low blood counts, the precautions you need to take will depend on which blood count is low. Suggestions for things that you should do are listed below:

When your white blood cell count is low:

- Practice good handwashing with soap and water or an alcohol-based hand rub. Wash your hands before eating and after using the toilet. If you have guests, ask them to wash their hands when they arrive.
- Stay away from people who are ill
- Practice good personal hygiene by taking a daily sponge bath, tub bath, or shower.
- Brush your teeth gently twice a day.
- Follow a special diet known as a **Neutropenic Diet**. Ask to speak to a dietitian to learn more.
- Take your temperature at least twice a day. If you develop a fever of 100.5°F or higher **call your doctor right away**.
- Avoid crowds and construction sites.

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- Avoid fresh cut flowers and gardening.
 - Avoid changing baby diapers and cleaning up after pets.
 - Avoid using over-the-counter pain or fever medications or enemas without first talking to your nurse or doctor.

When your platelet count is low:

- Watch for signs of bleeding. This includes nosebleeds, blood in your urine, black bowel movements, tiny purplish spots on your skin, or easy bruising.
- Avoid strenuous exercise or activities with a high risk of getting hurt.
- Use an electric razor for shaving.
- Do not take aspirin or products that contain aspirin
- Talk to your nurse or doctor before you use a stool softener
- Wear gloves while working in the garden
- Wear slippers or shoes when you get out of bed
- Use a toothbrush with soft bristles

For Low Red Blood Cell Count:

- Balance periods of activity with periods of rest.
- Eat a well balanced diet
- Move slowly from a sitting to a standing position to avoid becoming dizzy.

NOTES:

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