

Food Safety Tips During Cancer Treatment

Food safety is important at all times before, during and after cancer treatment. Your white blood cell counts may go down for short periods at a time during your treatment. This can affect your body's ability to fight infections. When your white blood cells are very low and your immune system is not working at its best, it is important for you to follow food safety guidelines.

Note:

- You do not need to follow special diets such as the Low Microbial diet or neutropenic diet when your white blood cell count is low. Follow the food safety tips mentioned below.
- Your white blood cell count will gradually return to normal levels between and after your treatments. Specific foods will not speed up the recovery of your white blood cell count.

Basic Food Safety Tips to follow:

- **Wash, Wash, Wash**
 - Wash your hands often through the day. Use warm soapy water and wash for 20 seconds before preparing or eating food.
- **Shop Smart**
 - Check expiry dates on dairy products, meats, eggs and prepared and packaged items.
 - Purchase only pasteurized milk, juices and honey.
 - Avoid items from bulk food containers, bins and deli foods.
 - Choose fresh fruits and vegetables that are not spoiled or bruised.
 - Avoid food sample offers at grocery stores or food markets
- **Keep your work area clean**
 - Ensure counters, cutting boards, utensils and dishes are cleaned with soap and water and air dried.
 - Replace dish cloths every day.
- **Use special care in preparing foods**
 - Keep raw meats and ready-to-eat food separate from other foods.
 - Do not thaw meats at room temperature. Thaw them in the refrigerator and cook soon afterwards.

- Wash all fruits and vegetables under cold running water. You do not need to use special sanitizers to wash produce.
 - Use separate cutting boards and utensils for raw meats and a separate one for fruits and vegetables.
- **Cook foods to proper temperatures**
 - Avoid raw eggs, oysters and fish (i.e.: sashimi).
 - Meat, poultry and seafood should be thoroughly cooked until it is no longer pink.
 - Refer to the Health Canada link below for specific cooking temperatures.
- **Store foods properly after eating**
 - Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.
 - Refrigerate or freeze any leftovers.
 - Reheat leftovers well and eat within a day.
- **Be aware when dining out**
 - Request that food is freshly prepared.
 - Avoid salad bars, buffets, potlucks, sidewalk vendors, delis where multiple people have access to food items.
 - Avoid foods with raw or undercooked meat, fish, poultry and eggs.
- **Drinking water safety**
 - Tap water and bottled water is safe to drink. You may wish to boil water at a rolling boil for 5 minutes before drinking if you are concerned about your water supply.
 - If there is any question or concern about water purity (e.g. well water), have it checked for bacterial content by contacting your local public health department.

For more information:

For more detailed information, contact Health Canada
<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-safety-vulnerable-populations/food-safety-people-with-weakened-immune-system.html>

Health Link BC

Contact a Dietitian at Health-Link-BC by dialing **8-1-1** from any telephone in BC or the Yukon. This is a free nutrition information service by Registered Dietitians that can provide information on healthy eating and cancer prevention.

Visit our website: www.bccancer.bc.ca