

# Infection

Side Effects – Symptoms & Solutions

## What is an infection?

An infection occurs when germs (such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi) enter your body and multiply. Cancer or chemotherapy can make infections more likely to occur, and they can make infections more serious than they would have been before you developed cancer.

## How do I know if I have an infection?

Below is a list of changes that may occur if you have an infection. Call your doctor right away if you experience any of them.

- A fever above 100.5°F (38°C), chills, or sweating *Note: Do not take any medication to lower a fever without your doctor's approval.*
- Loose bowel movements (for example, diarrhea); changes in urination; or unusual vaginal discharge or itching.
- Severe cough, sore throat, sinus pain/pressure, earache, headache, or stiff neck.
- Swelling, tenderness, or blisters/soars on your mouth, lips, or skin.

***It is possible to have an infection without experiencing any of the changes above. Be sure to discuss any concerns with your doctor or nurse.***

## What is my risk of getting an infection?

It is possible to estimate your risk for getting an infection using a blood test. Ask your doctor or nurse to calculate your “absolute neutrophil count” (ANC) from your latest results, and compare it with the table on the right.

ANC (Neutrophils/micro L)	Risk for Infection
1,500 – 2,000	No increased risk
1,000 – 1,500	Slightly increased risk
500 – 1,000	Moderately increased risk
Less than 500	Severely increased risk

## What are some ways I can lower my risk of getting an infection?

- Wash your hands often – before you eat; after coughing, sneezing, or blowing your nose; after using the bathroom, touching animals, or gardening; etc.
- After bowel movements, gently clean your rectal area. Ask your doctor or nurse for advice if you have irritation or hemorrhoids.
- Avoid people with illnesses you can catch (colds, flu, measles, chicken pox, etc) or children who were recently vaccinated with “live virus” (oral polio, chicken pox, etc.)
- Avoid crowds when possible. For example, shop when stores are not busy.
- Take good care of your teeth and gums. Only use mouthwashes that are approved by your doctor or nurse.
- Take a warm (not hot) shower, bath, or sponge bath every day. Gently pat yourself dry using a towel that has not been used by others.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor to lessen cuts to your skin, and do not share it with others.
- Wear gloves that protect your hands while gardening or cleaning up after others, especially small children.
- Avoid animal cages, litter boxes, and fish tanks; try to let others clean them.
- Clean cuts or scrapes every day with warm water, soap, and an antiseptic; and cover them with a clean, dry bandage.
- Do not squeeze or scratch pimples.
- Moisturize dry or cracked skin with lotion or oil.
- Do not get manicures, pedicures, false nails, or nail tips; and do not cut or tear your nail cuticles.
- Women should not use tampons, douches, or vaginal suppositories that have not been approved by their doctor.
- Use water-based lubricants and condoms during sex to avoid abrasion, injury or infection.
- Avoid standing water, including flower vases, humidifiers, and bird baths.
- Do not eat any of these foods raw or undercooked: fish, seafood, meat, eggs, or tofu.
- Ask your doctor if you or your family members should get flu shots or other vaccinations.

The information contained herein is not comprehensive and is intended only as a guide.