



3 STEPS TOWARD
Helping Patients Reduce Their Risk of Infection During Chemotherapy



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Don't Let an Infection During Chemotherapy Sideline Your Treatment

Stay in the game by understanding your infection risk

by CDC Foundation (Paid Content), September 3, 2019 | Comments: 0



Lisa Richardson, MD, MPH
Director, Division of Cancer Prevention and Control, CDC

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The image below shows the typical cycle of nadir:



What Is Nadir?

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What You Can Do to Help Prevent Infection During Chemotherapy

Cancer doesn't quit, and neither should you. Avoid infection with these practical tips:

- 1. Take your temperature often.** A fever can sometimes be the only sign of an infection, so take your temperature during your nadir, anytime you don't feel well or whenever your doctor recommends. Keep a thermometer handy. If you have a temperature of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, it's very important to call your doctor or emergency number immediately, even if it is in the middle of the night.
- 2. Clean your hands frequently.** Perhaps the easiest and most effective way to fight infection — especially when you're in a hospital or other healthcare facility for treatment where germs run rampant — is proper handwashing. Whenever you've touched something (food, trash, toilet, port, surgical site, etc.) or someone, wash your hands immediately and thoroughly.
- 3. Watch for the warning signs.** The following signs and symptoms may indicate the presence of infection in the body. If you or someone you love has cancer and you notice any of these, let your healthcare provider know right away.
 - Fever, chills and sweats
 - Change in cough or a new cough; sore throat or new mouth sore
 - Shortness of breath
 - Nasal congestion
 - Stiff neck
 - Burning or pain with urination, unusual vaginal discharge or irritation, increased urination, diarrhea
 - Redness, soreness or swelling in any area, including surgical wounds and ports
 - Vomiting
 - Pain in the abdomen or rectum
 - New pain

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• *New pain*

4. Talk to your provider. Stay in regular communication with your doctors and nurses during your treatment and let them know if you're experiencing any concerning symptoms. To help strengthen your immune system during chemotherapy, your doctor may prescribe medicine that will help your body make more white blood cells. The medicine may reduce your risk of infection. If at any point you must go to the ER or a hospital, let the provider know immediately that you are undergoing chemotherapy — it's dangerous to wait.

The Important Role of Caring for Someone With Cancer

If someone you love has cancer, you can play an important role in helping them stay on track. Along with the tips above, here are some additional tips to help your loved one through their treatment:

- Encourage them to take a bath or shower every day and use an unscented lotion so their skin won't get dry or cracked (and let an infection creep in).
- If they have to go to the ER, tell the person checking them in that they have cancer and are receiving chemo. It's important they are seen quickly.
- Ask their doctor when they're most at risk for getting an infection (when their white blood cell count will be at its lowest), also called nadir.
- Talk to their doctor about when they should get a flu shot...and get one yourself as well.
- Offer emotional support and help them stay positive, especially when they're feeling the negative effects of chemotherapy.

Why Preventing Infection During Chemo Is Important

A life with cancer may sometimes feel out of control. Arming yourself with the information you need to protect yourself or your loved one from infection can help you feel more empowered.

Remember, infection can derail or delay your chemotherapy doses and treatments, which may lengthen the road to remission. Infections can also lead to hospitalizations and, in some cases, may be fatal.

You've got this! Chemotherapy is tough on your immune system, so arm yourself with the info you need to protect yourself from infections. Talk to your healthcare team about your concerns or any changes in your health.

[Click here to view a list of Health Tips by Topic on how to help prevent infection during chemo](#)

Also of Interest:

- [Getting chemo? Let TINA help you prevent infection](#)

Disclaimer

The Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients program was made possible through a CDC Foundation partnership with, and funding from, Amgen Oncology. Celebrating its 10-year anniversary, the program provides resources in English and Spanish to help patients stay as healthy as possible during chemotherapy.



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Getting Chemo? Let TINA Help You Prevent Infection

A new online tool that is helping patients and caregivers
 by CDC Foundation (Paid Content), September 3, 2019 | Comments: 0



Meet TINA, a fully animated virtual healthcare provider who is helping patients and caregivers better understand the risks of infection during chemotherapy — and discover steps they can take to help prevent infection.

Available as a free online tool and mobile app, TINA takes your answers to a few simple questions, then responds with information on topics you're interested in knowing more about. **Take 10 minutes today** to find out how you can help prevent infection during chemotherapy — a vitally important step in your cancer treatment.

Here's a Sneak-Peak at TINA's Answers to Some Important Questions:

- Can I be around my friends and family while I'm getting chemotherapy?** Your friends and family are a big part of your support system; spending time with them is important. Unless a friend or family member is sick, most doctors agree the benefits of spending time with your loved ones outweigh the risks.
- How do I keep my skin germ-free?** During your treatment, it's important to shower or bathe every day to keep your skin clean and germ-free. Germs can get into your body through dry, cracked skin, so moisturize with a mild, unscented lotion to help keep your skin healthy and strong.
- Can I still care for my pet?** Pets are family - and often great company and comfort. Luckily, being around your pet is fine with a few extra precautions: get regular vet checkups and vaccinations for your pet; wash hands after play; keep the cat's litter box away from eating areas; don't let pets lick your mouth or open cuts; and don't have direct contact with your pet's urine or feces.
- Is there any special diet I should follow?** We've all heard it; you are what you eat. During chemo, you may not have a great appetite. But try to eat what you can. Good nutrition helps give your body the strength it needs to repair itself. Just remember these precautions: avoid raw, undercooked or unpasteurized food; wash fruits and veggies; and drink lots of water.
- How do I keep my port/catheter clean?** If you have a port or catheter, follow the care and handling instructions from your medical team. Keeping the device clean is always important, but, like everything else, it's extra important during your nadir (the period of time when your blood cell count drops to its lowest level following a chemotherapy treatment), when getting an infection is easier and more dangerous to your health. Any redness, swelling, soreness, fluids or pus around your device could be a sign of an infection. If you have any of these symptoms, contact your medical team right away.
- When should I contact my medical team?** Contact your medical team any time you have a possible sign of infection, whenever you're concerned about something or if you have questions about anything.

You've got this! Chat with TINA and learn how you can reduce your risk of infection during chemotherapy. Most importantly, talk to your healthcare team if you have any questions or concerns during your treatment.

[Click here to learn more from TINA about the risk for infection during chemotherapy](#)

Also of Interest:

- Don't let an infection during chemotherapy sideline your treatment

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