

# CANCER CAREGIVERS

## A CHEMO SIDE EFFECT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT: NEUTROPENIA

- Chemotherapy's job is to kill cancer cells. Sometimes, chemo will also destroy healthy white blood cells (called neutrophils), which are one of our body's main defenses against getting sick.
- When our white blood cell count dips really low this is a common side effect of chemo called **neutropenia**.

### WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL

- 60,000 cancer patients are hospitalized in the United States each year because their neutropenia will lead to a serious infection.
- 1 in 14 of these patients will die. \*

1 in 14 

### HOW IT WORKS

Chemo may cause your loved one to get neutropenia.



Neutropenia increases their chance of getting an infection.



An infection can delay their treatment, put them in the hospital and be deadly.



### WHAT! NO WARNING SIGNS?

That's right. **Neutropenia is an invisible side effect. The only way to know if and when your loved one has neutropenia is through a blood test.**

### A RED FLAG!



A fever in a cancer patient is an emergency and may be the only sign of an infection.

### TAKE CONTROL



Take their temperature anytime they don't feel well or whenever their doctor recommends.



If they have to go to the ER, tell the person checking them in that they have cancer and are receiving chemo.



### Ask their doctor

- when they're most at risk (when their white blood cell count will be at its lowest).
- when they should get a flu shot ... and get one yourself as well.



If they get a fever, call their doctor immediately... even after hours.



Wash your hands a lot and encourage your loved one and anyone around them to do the same.

\*Caggiano V, et al. *Cancer*. 2005; 103: 1916-1924.

*Preventing Infections in Cancer Patients* is a comprehensive initiative led by CDC and the CDC Foundation to reduce infections in cancer patients. For more information on this topic and to learn more about this program, please visit [www.PreventCancerInfections.org](http://www.PreventCancerInfections.org).

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