

Production

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Neutropenic isolation

**Guide for users in cancer care follow-up,
and their close friends and family**

What is neutropenia?

Neutropenia indicates a decrease in the number of neutrophils (one type of white blood cell) in the bloodstream. It often occurs following chemotherapy because the medication destroys cancer cells as well as some healthy white blood cells.

Neutrophils play a role in your body's ability to defend against bacteria (microbes) and viruses which are present in the environment and also inside our bodies and on our skin. Having fewer neutrophils means that the body cannot defend itself optimally which is why it is important to avoid infections by following appropriate hygiene measures. These measures are designed to reduce the presence of microbes in the environment (wearing a mask, washing hands, well-cooked food, isolation, etc.).

What is neutropenic isolation?

Neutropenic isolation is a protection measure for users with a weakened immune system. It is a way to prevent and control infections. You must remain in your room during this period and may not leave except for examinations. Your close family and friends will be able to visit while respecting the guidelines provided by your healthcare team. Your doctor will decide when neutropenic isolation measures can be lifted

Services available during neutropenic isolation

- A physiotherapist can suggest exercises for your mental and physical well being adapted to your condition.
- Volunteers are available during the day to keep you company if you want.
- A spiritual care provider can visit you and your family to discuss the situation and help you make sense of all the constraints you are dealing with. This person can also guide you through methods of meditation.
- The psychosocial team will also provide support during this time of isolation.

Some suggestions for managing quality of life during isolation

- Watch your favourite films.
- Keep a journal. Writing can help you feel better.
- Do physical exercise such as stationary bicycle.
- Practice memory exercises with games like Sudoku, crosswords, word searches or chess.
- Listen to your favourite music, podcasts or do meditation / relaxation exercises.
- Ask close family or friends to bring a musical instrument, art paper for sketching, painting or your favourite hobby.
- Try scrapbooking with photos of family or travels with family or friends.
- Knit, play Scrabble, do puzzles.
- Write letters or messages to close family and friends.



What precautions to take while in neutropenic isolation?

Hand hygiene

- Wash your hands thoroughly and regularly after going to the bathroom and before meals to remove bacteria from all surfaces of your hands.
- Ask your close family and friends to wash their hand on entering and leaving your room. This guideline also applies to arriving and leaving the hospital.

Body hygiene

Because skin provides a natural barrier to infections, it is important to look after it.

- Wash daily using an unscented, mild soap. Rinse your body well. Pat yourself dry without rubbing, particularly in the underarm and groin areas. Then apply a hydrating lotion.
- After bowel movements, wash your anal area with soap and water. Rinse and dry well. If you feel pain in the anal area, inform your nurse or doctor.
- To avoid cuts, use an electric shaver rather than one with blades.
- Keep your nails clean and short. Do not cut your nail cuticles. Use creams or special products intended for this purpose.

Oral hygiene

- Brush your teeth after every meal and at bedtime with a soft toothbrush.
- If you do not use dental floss regularly, it is not recommended you start now to avoid making your gums bleed.
- Avoid spicy, cold or very hot food.
- Use an alcohol-free mouthwash, a salt and water based solution or one prescribed by your doctor.
- If you wear dentures, rinse them after every meal. Remove and clean them with an appropriate solution at night.
- If you develop redness or ulcers on your gums, do not wear your dentures and inform your nurse.
- Inform your nurse, if you have any cavities.



Further information

- Flowers, plants and stuffed animals are not permitted in rooms because they are a potential source of bacteria during neutropenia.
- If you have to leave your room for examinations, you must wear a **procedural mask** to protect against infection. The staff will provide you with this mask before you leave the room.



Diet

- If a close family member or friend wants to cook you a meal during your hospitalization, consult the brochure *Prévention des intoxications alimentaires*. Consult with your nurse.
- You must use utensils wrapped for single use.
- When you receive your meal, you will have approximately one hour before it is removed.
- It is recommended that you drink bottled water during the hospitalization. Do not drink directly from the spout of the bottle. Water bottles must be discarded after 24 hours.

About visitors

- Visitors must wash their hands with soap and water or use a hydroalcoholic gel before and after each visit and follow current health measures.
- Anyone with a cold, flu or any other infection must not visit.
- When you return home, follow the instructions in the guide on *Neutropenie and preventing infections*. Consult your nurse.

What you may experience during neutropenic isolation?

- When you are in neutropenic isolation, it is normal to feel lonely, stressed and unhappy. Many patients experience these feelings during neutropenic isolation. It is a difficult period for you and your close friends and family. Everyone on your healthcare team is there to support you during this period of isolation.
- Take this time to relax and think about yourself. We suggest doing activities that make you feel good.