Neutropenic Diet Guidelines for Adult Inpatients with Blood Cancer

Nutrition & Dietetics Department
What is a neutropenic diet?

The immune system is the body’s natural defence system for fighting diseases and infections. White blood cells, including neutrophils, are an important part of this system.

Chemotherapy attacks cancer cells and can temporarily reduce the number of white blood cells produced by the body. When the number of white blood cells is lower than normal, your immune system is suppressed and you are less able to fight infection.

This reduction in neutrophils (a type of white cell) is known as neutropenia and is a common side effect of chemotherapy.

When you are neutropenic you are at greater risk of acquiring an infection, and some food products can be a source of infection.

In order to minimise your risk of infection while you are having chemotherapy (and your neutrophil count is less than 1) you need to avoid certain foods and drinks which contain large amounts of bacteria, moulds and yeasts (see following list). This is called a neutropenic diet.

Foods to avoid include:

- Unpasteurised, soft and blue cheeses e.g. brie and stilton
- Bio or probiotic yoghurts and drinks
- Raw fish e.g. sushi and smoked salmon
- Rare or undercooked meat
- Raw eggs and food made from uncooked eggs
- Paté
- Raw vegetables, including salad items
- Unpeeled or dried fruit
- Raw or unshelled nuts
- Uncooked ground pepper, herbs and spices
- Bottled still water. Fizzy water is okay
Take-away foods i.e. burgers, pizza and products from any take-away outlet

Foods which are shared with others e.g. jars of jam, bottled sauces

Foods which are stale or past their use by date

If you are finding it challenging to choose from the menu please ask the ward team for the alternative neutropenic menu

When at home what food safety advice should I follow?

Good food safety, handling and hygiene practices are essential to prevent contamination or recontamination of foods during the food preparation and cooking processes.

- Store food safely and buy a fridge thermometer to make sure your fridge is working properly
- It is recommended that the temperature range of your refrigerator is 0-4°C
- Store raw and cooked food separately
- Wash your hands thoroughly with warm water and liquid soap and dry prior to food preparation
- Carefully wash all fruit and vegetables
- Microwave cookers can be used for defrosting (but ensure the food is defrosted all the way through). Heat prepared foods according to manufacturer’s instructions
- Make sure hot food is thoroughly cooked and ensure it is piping hot all the way through
- Do not re-heat cooked rice
- Use all foods within best before and use by dates
Reference source(s):

Contact details

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PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757
Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net
Opening hours: 9.00am–4.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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