

Safer eating with neutropenia

Information for patients

This diet sheet is for patients that are undergoing cancer treatment including chemotherapy, stem cell or bone marrow transplant that may experience neutropenia. If you have any questions, please speak to the team caring for you.

Neutropenia is a condition where your neutrophil level decreases and makes you more susceptible to infection from bacteria or fungus because your immune system may be weaker. It is important that you take some extra steps to ensure you are eating safely. If your neutrophil level is less than $1.0 \times 10^9/L$ you will need to follow the advice below.

During your hospital stay

- All food provided in hospital will meet safety regulations and be safe to eat.
- Ensure you wash your hands before meals.
- Ensure food is stored correctly and does not exceed the use-by date. When opened, please ensure food is covered and used within 24hrs.
- If food is being brought in, please ensure it is eaten while hot and/or stored correctly in your fridge.
- Any food brought in should be purchased from clean, reputable shops and stored and cooked according to manufacturer's instructions.

At home

- Wash your hands before cooking and eating. Protect cuts and wounds before handling food.
- Keep raw and cooked meats separate when being stored. Raw meats should be stored at the bottom of the fridge to prevent contamination.
- Use different chopping boards for fruit and vegetable, cooked and raw meats.
- Clean all surfaces appropriately before and after cooking.
- Please check 'use-by' and 'sell-by' dates before buying or eating food.
- Always cover your food to prevent contamination.
- Defrost food in the fridge, not at room temperature.
- Ensure all reheated food is piping hot before eating. Please ensure food reaches 70°C or above for 2 minutes.
- Avoid reheating rice and takeaway food as harmful bacteria can survive the heating process.
- Avoid buffet food and open salad or deli bars in restaurants and supermarkets.
- When eating out, please ensure the food hygiene rating of the restaurant and takeaway is 5.

	Foods to be avoided	Safer alternatives
Meat and poultry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raw or undercooked meat and poultry, for example, meat which is still pink – rare steak • smoked or cured meat, for example, salami or Parma ham • unpasteurised paté • rotisserie chicken • meat from a barbeque 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • well-cooked meat and poultry – juices should run clear and no pink showing • smoked or cured meat is cooked and piping hot • cooked, cold, sliced meats from a packet eaten as per manufacture advice • tinned or jar meat or paste
Fish and shellfish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smoked salmon unless eaten directly from a freshly opened packet • raw or lightly cooked shellfish (lifelong avoidance) • sushi made with raw fish 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vacuum-packed fish eaten straight from a new packet • well-cooked shellfish, for example, prawn curry • well-cooked fresh, frozen or tinned fish
Milk and yoghurt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unpasteurised milk or yoghurt (can be found in some markets and from farms) • probiotic yogurts and probiotic supplements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pasteurised milk and yoghurt – those found in supermarkets will be pasteurised • includes live, Greek and fruit yoghurts
Cheese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • soft, ripened cheeses such as brie, camembert, goat cheese and blue veined cheese such as blue stilton • soft goat and sheep cheeses • cheese made with unpasteurised or raw milk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pasteurised cheeses – check labels (most hard cheeses will be fine) • processed cheese cream cheese, cheese slices, cottage cheese • white stilton
Eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raw or undercooked eggs • raw egg products, for example, homemade mayonnaise, homemade ice cream, mousse, eggnog, hollandaise sauce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shop bought mayonnaise and other products made with pasteurised egg
Fruit and Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unwashed fruit, vegetables or salad • salad from salad bars • damaged or overripe fruit or vegetables • unpasteurised or freshly squeezed fruit or vegetable juice or smoothies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fresh fruit, vegetables should be washed well • tinned fruit. • freshly prepared washed salad
Ice cream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ice cream or milkshakes sold from mobile vans or soft-serve machines • homemade ice cream 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hard or individually wrapped ice creams • fresh milkshakes
Miscellaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unpasteurised or 'fresh farm' honey or honeycomb • stuffed vine leaves • fresh nuts or nuts in shells • deli counter products including olives, hummus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pasteurised or heat-treated honey • golden syrup or jam • cooked nuts, nut in a can, nut butters • pre-packed hummus, olives

Details of additional sources of support and information

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust 'Eating Well When You Have Cancer' Booklet. Accessible at [Eating well | The Royal Marsden](#)

Food Standards Agency. Check food hygiene ratings at establishments. Search for [ratings | Food Standards Agency](#)

Who do I contact with questions or concerns?

Please contact your clinical nurse specialist or the specialist haematology dietitians if you have any specific queries about safer eating with neutropenia.

Sharing your information

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

Care provided by students

We provide clinical training where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS
Tel: 020 3299 3601
Email: kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND
Tel: 01689 863252
Email: kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net