Cancer and cancer treatment can weaken the immune system and increase the risk of infection.

White blood cells are an essential part of the body’s defence against infection because they attack and destroy germs, such as bacteria, after they enter the body. The risk of infection increases as the number of white blood cells decreases as the result of some cancer treatments. This condition is called neutropenia.

If you develop neutropenia it is very important to protect yourself against infection. Contact your healthcare team right away if you think an infection is developing.

The following may be signs of infection:
• A temperature greater than 38°C
• Fever
• Shaking, chills
• Swelling or redness of any part of the body

If you are going through a period when your white blood cell count is low, you need to take food safety precautions to avoid harmful bacteria and food-borne illness.

Follow these “safe food” suggestions when your white blood cell count is low:

**Safe food at the supermarket**
• Buy cans and jars that look perfect
• Dented or bulging cans, cracked jars, unsealed lids may mean food has germs that could make you sick

• Check for “use by” dates - DO NOT USE IF BEYOND THE EXPIRATION DATE
• Put refrigerated or frozen items in cart last and take home immediately
• Put raw meat and poultry into a plastic bag so meat juices won’t drip on other foods such as lettuce or fruit that will be eaten raw
• Check eggs - open carton and do not buy if any are broken or cracked. Only buy refrigerated, pasteurized eggs
• Be sure food is being stored at safe temperatures - hot food is steaming and cold food is cold
• Deli foods should be avoided
• If you are selecting items from a counter, make sure counter person washes hands and changes gloves
Safe food at home

Storing
• After shopping – go directly home and put food away immediately

Refrigerator:
• Use a thermometer to ensure food is being kept at 40°F/4°C or below
• Make sure thawing juices from meat and poultry do not drip on other foods
• Leave eggs in carton and do not store in door
• Keep refrigerator clean
• Store ground meat, poultry and fish up to 1-2 days; other red meats such as steak or roasts 3-5 days

Freezer:
• Keep food safe by preventing the growth of micro-organisms that cause food to go bad and make you sick
• Use a thermometer to ensure food is being kept at 0°F/-18°C or below

Food Storage Savvy: Your Guide to What Goes Where

Canned goods last 2+ years but can be damaged by temperatures above 100°F
Mayo and peanut butter can be stored in the pantry, move mayo to the fridge when it's opened
Fruits with pits, like peaches and plums, should be placed in a closed paper bag until ripe, then refrigerated. Keep tomatoes in the pantry only if they'll be eaten within 1-2 days, otherwise, they go in the fridge
Keep potatoes in a cool, dark part of the pantry and remove any that start to go bad. Onions like the same conditions, but don’t put them together. Potatoes and onions should be separated

Pantry:
• Store canned foods and other shelf stable products in a cool, dry place
• Never put them above the stove, under the sink or basement
• Always check the expiry dates and do not use products after it have expired

Cooking/preparing food safely
Make sure that you and your kitchen are clean

Wash hands frequently
Use plenty of soap and hot, running water for at least twenty seconds. Use hand sanitiser for cleaning hands when soap and water are not available. Wash or sanitise hands:
• After using the restroom
• Before eating
• Before and after each step of food preparation
• After handling garbage
• After touching pets
• After sweeping the floor or wiping down the counters

Wash everything before and after it touches food.
**Cutting boards:**
- Use only plastic or glass for cutting raw meat and poultry or have a cutting board you use exclusively for meat and poultry
- Sanitise with solution of 1 tsp. chlorine bleach per quart of water by flooding surface and allowing it to stand for several minutes, then rinse and dry
- Commercial sanitisers – follow directions on product label

**Avoid cross contamination:**
- Fresh fruits and vegetables need to be clean. Rinse them under warm running water to wash dirt away. Use a produce brush when appropriate.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs and their juices away from other foods
- Remember germs can be spread by a dish towel or wash cloth – when wiping up juices, wash towel before using it again or use paper towels and throw them away

**Thawing:**
- Meat, poultry and seafood need to stay cold while they thaw. Thaw them:
  - In the refrigerator – 1 to 2 days before you will cook
  - In the microwave – use the defrost setting

**Cooking temperature:**
- Do not eat raw or undercooked animal products, including meat, pork, game, poultry, eggs, and fish

**Cook food to safe temperatures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOOD</th>
<th>TEMP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ground meat &amp; meat mixtures</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef, veal, lamb &amp; pork</td>
<td>71°C (160°F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey, chicken</td>
<td>74°C (165°F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fresh beef, veal, lamb</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium rare</td>
<td>Not safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>71°C (160°F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well done</td>
<td>77°C (170°F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poultry</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken &amp; turkey, whole</td>
<td>82°C (180°F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry breasts, roast</td>
<td>77°C (170°F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poultry thighs, wings</td>
<td>82°C (180°F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eggs & egg dishes**

- Eggs cook
  - Egg dishes: Until yolk & white are firm
  - 71°C (160°F)

- Fish dishes
  - 71°C (160°F)

- Leftovers & casseroles
  - 74°C (165°F)

- Put leftovers in the refrigerator or freezer as soon as you finish eating. Put them in shallow dishes so they cool faster. Germs grow very fast at room temperature

- Use refrigerated leftovers within two days

**Eating out safely**
- Always order meat, poultry, and fish well done; if the food arrives undercooked, it should be sent back
- Ask how sauces and dressings are prepared; if raw or undercooked eggs or insufficiently cooked meat drippings are used, do not order those dishes. If the server does not know how the food is prepared, ask him or her to check with the kitchen. If still doubtful, order something else
- Avoid salad bars – others may have left germs behind
- Avoid some buffets. If dirty plates are used for second helping, avoid. If holding temperatures are questionable, avoid (is the hot food hot?). Avoid high-risk foods from buffets (e.g. eggs, cream dishes, rare beef)
- At fast food restaurants, ask for food to be prepared freshly
- Do not eat raw seafood including oysters on the half shell, raw clams, sushi and sashimi; lightly steamed seafood, such as mussels and snails, should be avoided
- Caesar salad dressing should be avoided since it contains raw eggs