

# Preventing Infection During Treatment

Cancer and its treatment can weaken your immune system and leave you at risk for infections. By reducing your exposure to bacteria, harmful organisms and food borne illnesses, you can protect yourself against damaging illness.

When your white blood count is low you are at the highest risk for infections. Doctors often advise that you follow some strict precautions against infection or illness:

- Strict hand washing:
  - Wash hands in warm, soapy water for about 20 seconds:
    - before and after touching food, garbage, pets, face, hair, sores or cuts, other people.
    - before and after eating.
    - after using the restroom.
    - after coughing or sneezing



- Good personal hygiene
- Limiting visitors, especially anyone with signs of illness or infection
- Avoidance of exposure to live plants and live flowers in water
- Wearing a mask when out of your home or room
- Good care of mouth, teeth and gums

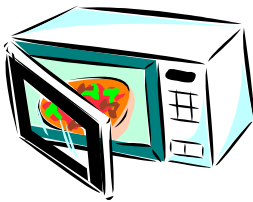


## Recommendations for Handling Food:

- Use separate cutting surfaces for meats and raw fruits or vegetables. Clean cooking utensils and food preparation surfaces with warm, soapy water and then sanitize with a solution of 1 tablespoon bleach to 4 cups warm water. Let the solution sit for about 2 minutes and then rinse with hot, clean water.

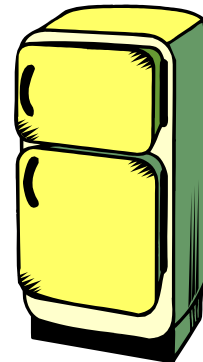


- Keep hot food hot (above 140°F) and cold food cold (below 40°F).
- Thaw foods in the refrigerator or microwave.



Never thaw foods at room temperature.  
Cook foods immediately after thawing.

- Refrigerate all leftovers within 2 hours of cooking and eat them within 24 hours.
- Eat only well-cooked foods. Avoid raw and undercooked foods.
- Use frozen pasteurized eggs or powdered egg whites for raw eggs in recipes such as eggnog, Caesar salad dressing and meringues.
- Bottled water and bottled soft drinks and juices should be safe to drink.



**Contact your local VA Dietitian for more information.**