Basics of Cancer Care Workshop

"Care of Patients Receiving Chemotherapy"

Nursing Division,

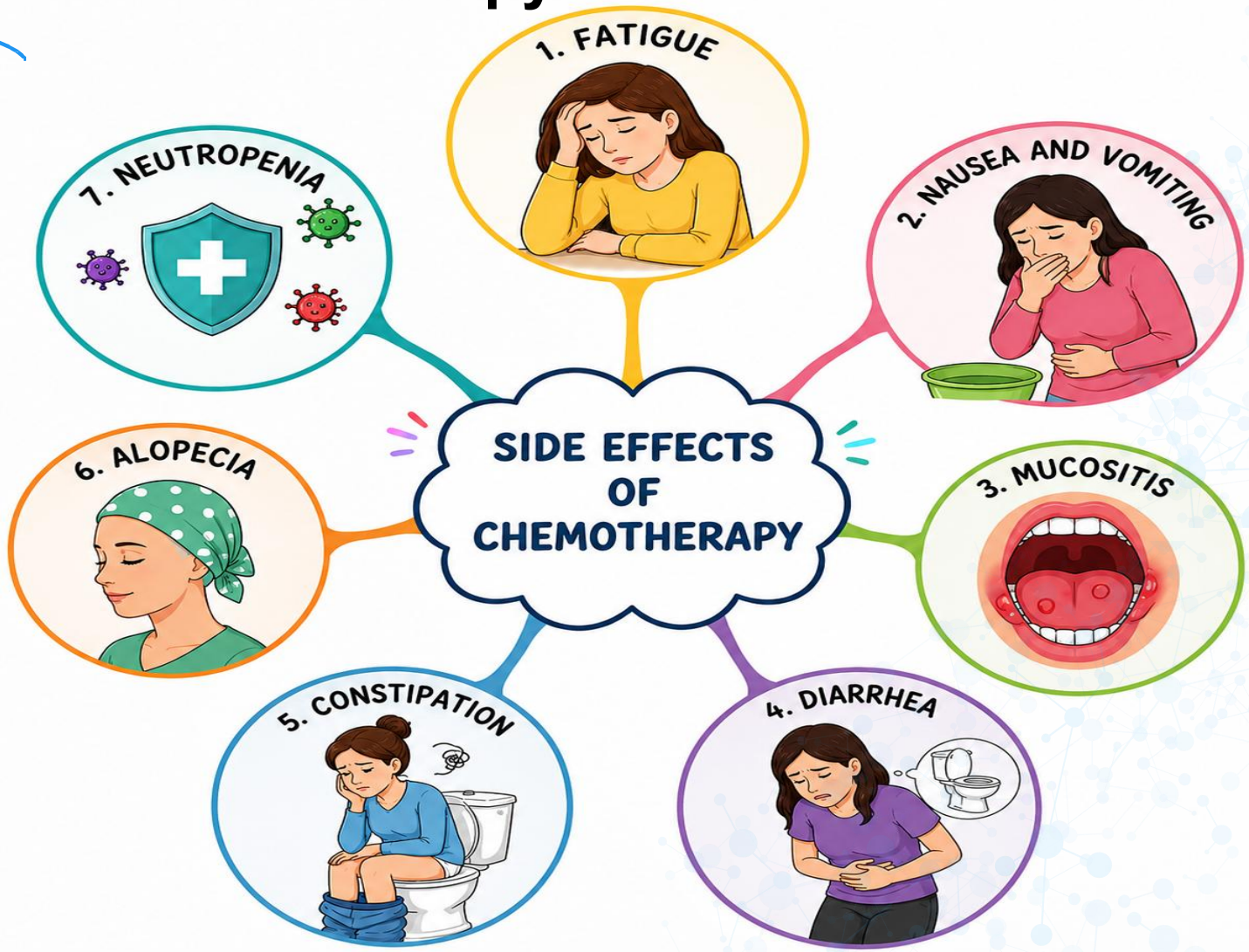
Ministry of Health, Malaysia

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, learners will be able to:

- Describe the management of common chemotherapy side effects.
- Identify red-flag symptoms that require urgent medical review.
- Provide patient education on common chemotherapy toxicities.

Side Effects of Chemotherapy

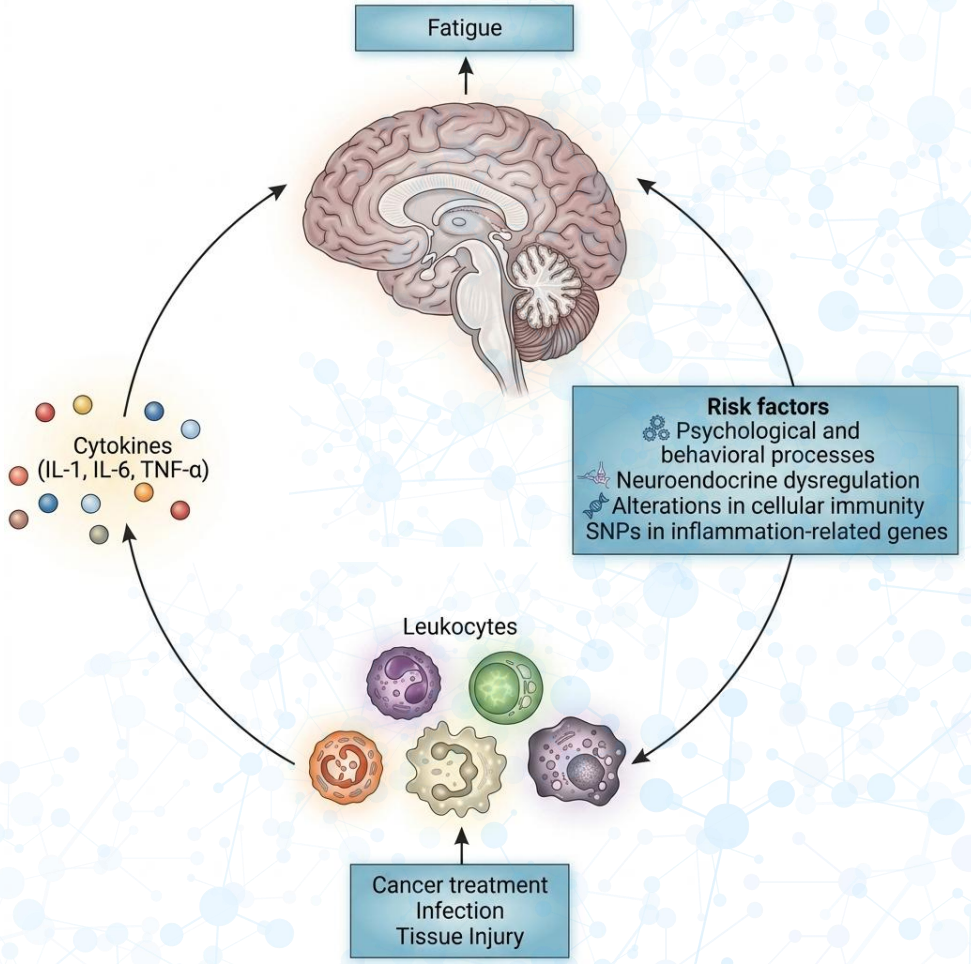


Health Education

Management of Side Effects

FATIGUE

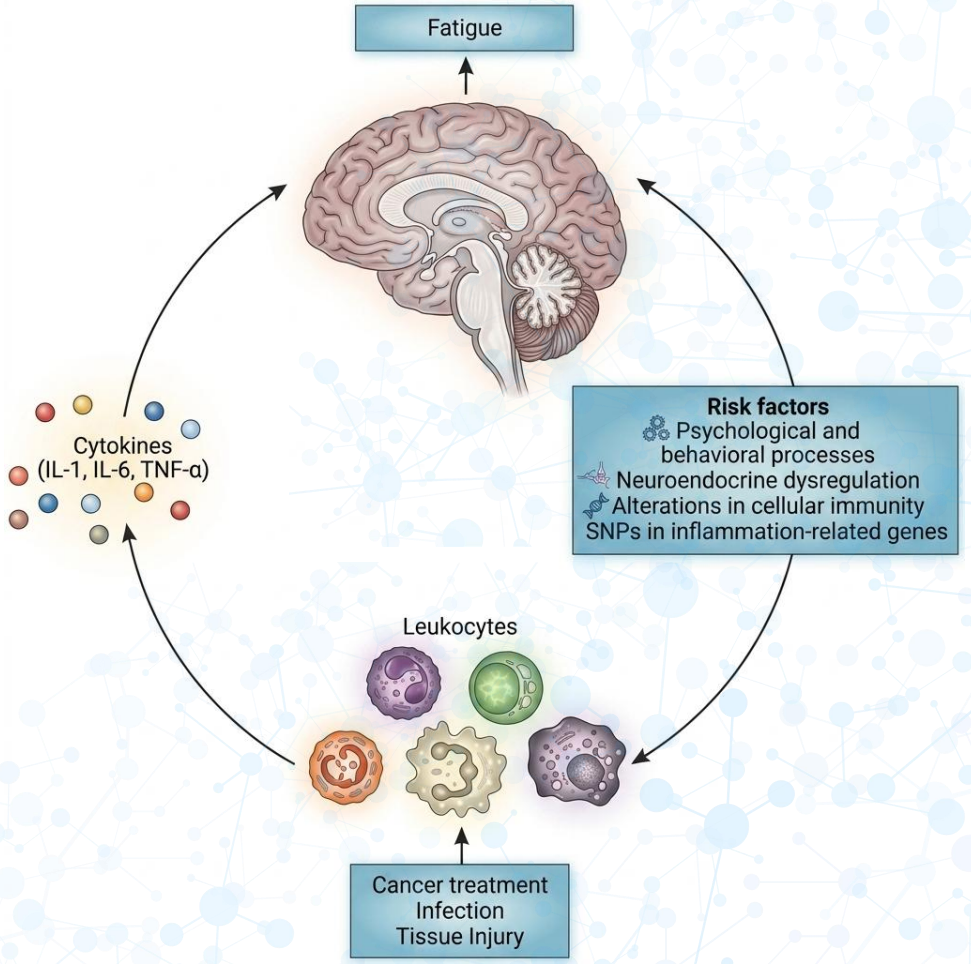
- Teach patient energy conservation strategies.
- Plan daily activities so that the patient has time to rest.
- Take short naps or breaks, rather than one long rest period.
- Advise the patient to do light physical activity if tolerated, and to use relaxing activities such as music or reading during rest periods.
- Encourage regular light-to-moderate physical activity, such as walking, if clinically safe, because exercise is recommended for cancer-related fatigue.



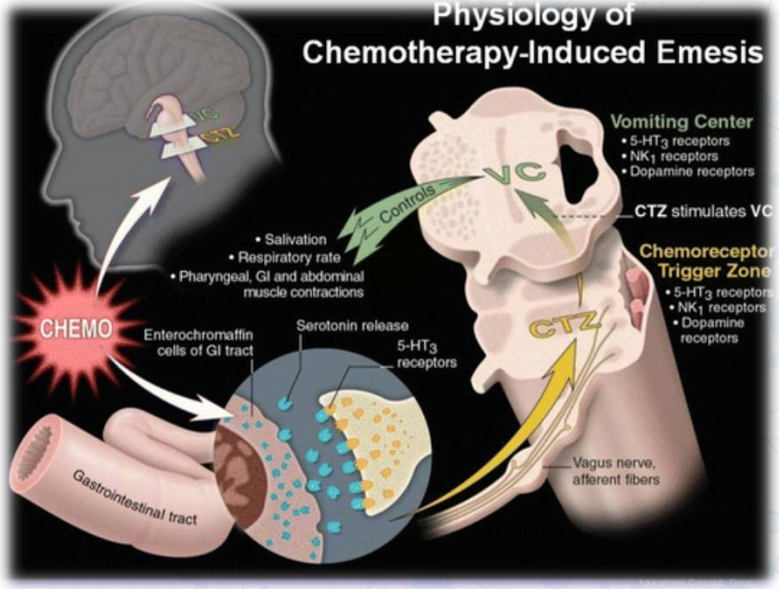
Management of Side Effects

FATIGUE

- Assess for anaemia, infection, dehydration, poor nutrition, sleep disturbance, pain, depression and medication effects.
- Encourage small, frequent, nutritious meals as tolerated and adequate hydration.
- Advise relatives or caregivers to assist the patient when needed.



Management of Side Effects



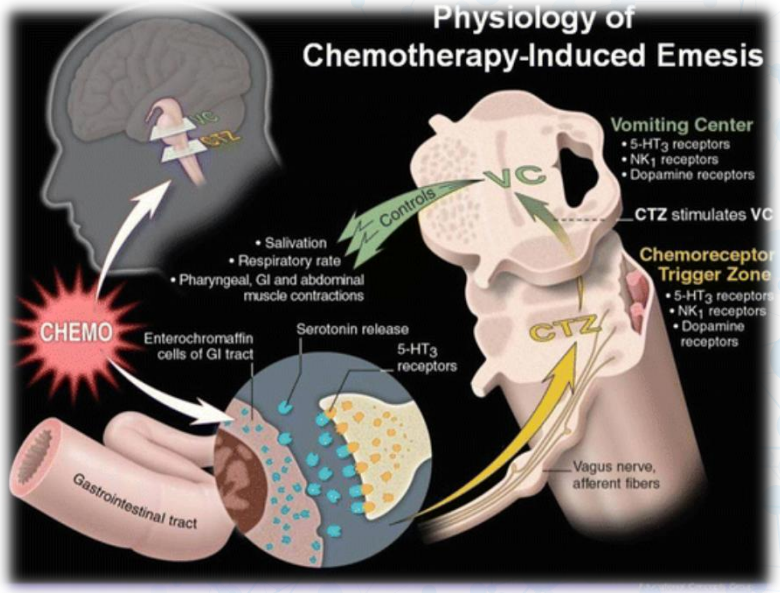
GIT TOXICITY - NAUSEA AND VOMITING

- Eat small amounts of food often during the day.
- Take time when eating and drinking.
- Eat cold food or at room temperature to decrease its smell and taste.
- Avoid fatty, fried, spicy, or very sweet foods.
- Avoid strong odours in food or in environment.
- Eat according to tolerance. Some patients may prefer light meals before chemotherapy; avoid heavy meals if nausea is triggered. Follow dietitian/oncology advice.
- Get enough rest in quiet and comfortable environment.
- Do not lie flat for 2 hours after eating. Sitting up can help digestion and decrease stomach aches.

Management of Side Effects

GIT TOXICITY - NAUSEA AND VOMITING

- Avoid vigorous exercise right after eating may cause more stomach discomfort. Get plenty of rest.
- If having a bad taste in mouth, rinse mouth often using water before and after taken food.
- Administer antiemetic medication as prescribed (Eg: Granisetron, Metoclopramide). Antiemetic choice depends on emetogenic risk and may include a 5-HT3 antagonist, dexamethasone, NK1 antagonist and/or olanzapine according to protocol.
- Seek medical attention if persistent vomiting, inability to keep fluids down, dehydration, fever, severe abdominal pain, blood in vomitus, or reduced urine output.



Management of Side Effects

GIT TOXICITY - MUCOSITIS

- Perform mouth care every 2–4 hours while awake.
- Brush gently and rinse regularly with bland rinses such as normal saline or sodium bicarbonate solution according to local policy.
- Avoid using commercial alcohol mouthwash to avoid irritation.
- Wear dentures only if necessary.
- Treat oral infection early.
- Administer local/systemic pain medications.



FIGURE 1. Mucositis affecting the right lateral border of the tongue.

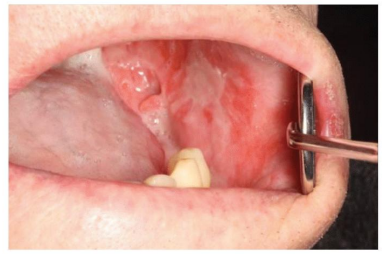


FIGURE 2. Impact of mucositis on the left buccal mucosa and oropharynx.



FIGURE 3. Mucositis presents on the left buccal mucosa.

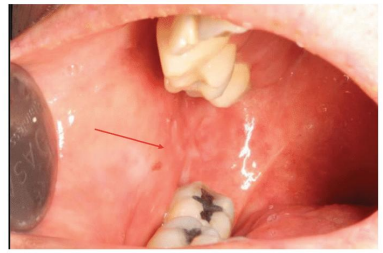


FIGURE 4. Mucositis noted on the right retromolar pad.

Managing oral mucositis. (2025, July/August). *Decisions in Dentistry*, *11*(4). decisionsindentistry.com

Management of Side Effects

GIT TOXICITY - MUCOSITIS

- Use a soft toothbrush to clean the teeth and gums gently.
- Administer antifungal treatment only if oral candidiasis or fungal infection is suspected/confirmed and prescribed.
- Encourage high protein diet.
- Take food in small amount – reduce pain & maintain nutritional status.
- Avoid hot, spicy, acidic or rough-textured foods that may worsen pain.
- Encourage adequate fluids if not contraindicated; individualise for renal failure, heart failure, fluid restriction or poor oral intake.



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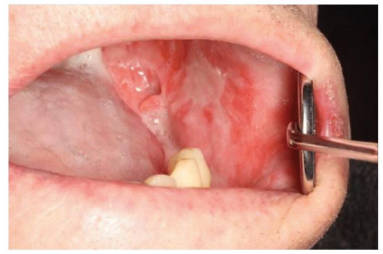


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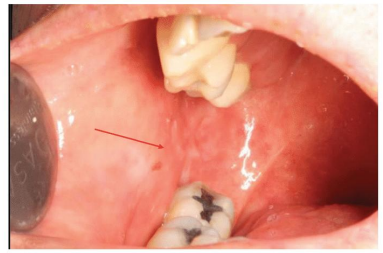


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Management of Side Effects

GIT TOXICITY - DIARRHOEA

- Drink plenty of fluids, around 2–3 L/day if not contraindicated.
- Avoid hot and spicy foods to prevent irritation.
- Avoid high-fibre, greasy, spicy foods and some fruit juices if they worsen diarrhoea. Use a low-fibre diet temporarily if advised.
- Avoid high-fibre foods; consume a low-fibre diet temporarily and avoid lactose-containing foods if they worsen symptoms.

Management of Side Effects

GIT TOXICITY - DIARRHOEA

- Escalate urgently if fever, neutropenia, blood in stool, severe abdominal pain, dehydration, dizziness, grade 3–4 diarrhoea, or diarrhoea during immunotherapy.
- Skin care at perianal area – clean perianal area gently with warm water if necessary.
- Administer antidiarrheal medication as prescribed (Eg: Diphenoxylate/Atropine).

Management of Side Effects

GIT TOXICITY - CONSTIPATION

- Drink plenty of fluids, around 2–3 L/day if not contraindicated.
- Take a high-fibre diet, such as whole grains, bread, cereals, fruits and vegetables, if appropriate.
- Avoid high-fibre loading if bowel obstruction is suspected, if the patient has severe nausea/vomiting, poor intake or is on a restricted diet.
- Assess opioids, antiemetics such as 5-HT3 antagonists, reduced mobility and dehydration. Urgent review if severe abdominal pain, vomiting, distension or no flatus.

Management of Side Effects

GIT TOXICITY - CONSTIPATION

- Avoid or cut back on any foods that cause constipation, such as cheese or eggs.
- Do some light exercise such as walking to help bowel movement.
- Administer laxative medication as prescribed (Eg: Lactulose, Bisacodyl).

Management of Side Effects

CUTANEOUS TOXICITY - ALOPECIA

- Cutting hair shorter before treatment begins will help in reducing anxiety due to massive hair fall.
- Keep your hair clean using a gentle shampoo, such as baby shampoo.
- Use wide-toothed comb to reduce hair breakage and hair fall.
- Do not bleach, curl, or perm your hair.



Management of Side Effects

CUTANEOUS TOXICITY - ALOPECIA

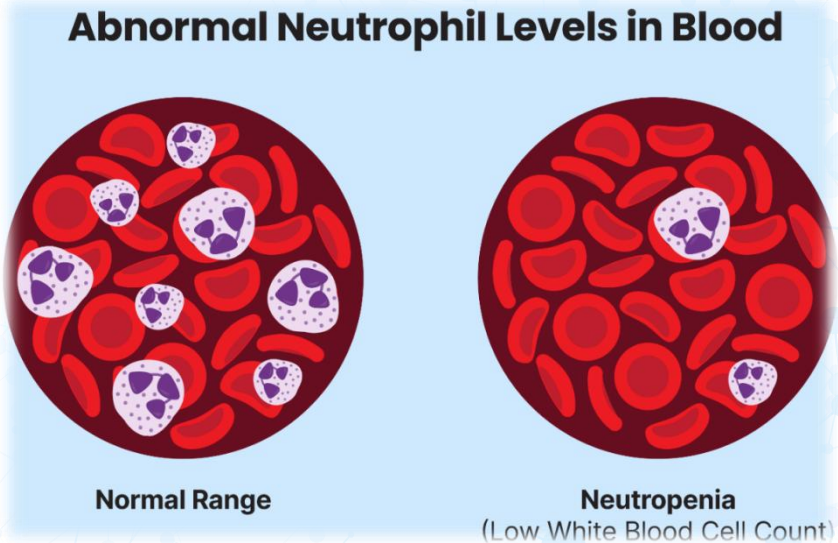
- Avoid hair styling agents such as hair spray, gel - make the hair fall out faster.
- Use hat, scarves or wig to avoid sunlight and improve self-confidence.
- Scalp cooling may reduce chemotherapy-induced alopecia for selected regimens if available and appropriate, but it is not suitable for all patients.



Management of Side Effects

HEMATOLOGICAL TOXICITY – NEUTROPENIA

- Educate patients about signs and symptoms of neutropenic sepsis, such as fever, chills or feeling unwell, and advise them to attend the nearest hospital urgently.
- Neutropenic sepsis is an acute medical emergency; empirical antibiotics should be given immediately in hospital according to local protocol.



Management of Side Effects

HEMATOLOGICAL TOXICITY – NEUTROPENIA

Hygiene:

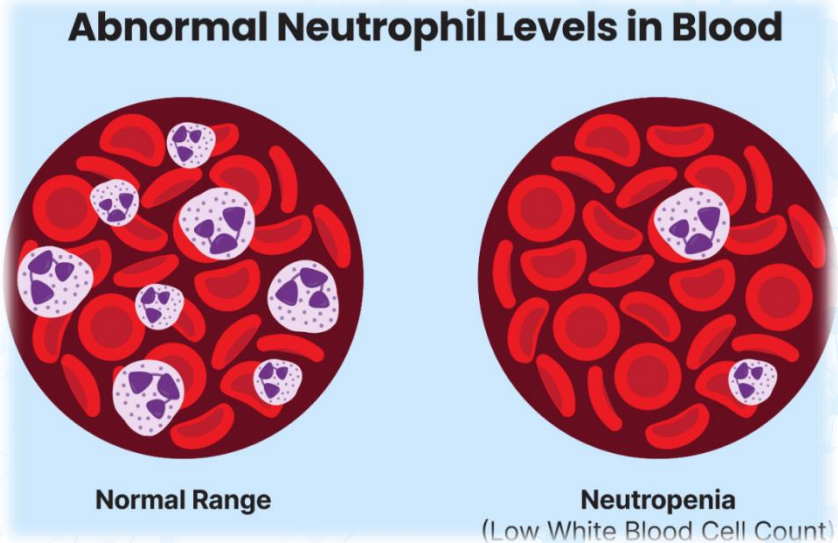
Maintain personal hygiene such as hand washing to prevent infection. Wash and keep dry after urination – prevent UTI.

Diet:

- A balanced diet with adequate protein, vitamins and calories supports recovery.
- Eat freshly prepared, well-cooked food; avoid unsafe raw or undercooked foods.

Activity:

Avoid contact with people who are unwell, practice hand hygiene, avoid crowded places during neutropenic periods and follow local mask advice.



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THANK YOU