



# Neutropenic Diet

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Health System  
Information  
for Patients*

## What is a neutropenic diet?

A neutropenic (nu-tro-PEE-nik) diet is for people with weakened immune systems. This diet helps protect them from bacteria and other harmful organisms found in some food and drinks. If your immune system is not working well, your body may have a hard time protecting itself from these bacteria. Cooking foods (like beef, chicken, fish, and eggs) well makes sure that all bacteria are killed.

## Why do I need to follow a neutropenic diet?

Doctors often recommend this diet before and after certain types of chemotherapy and other cancer treatments. People who have had an organ transplant or who are being treated for HIV/AIDS also may need to follow this diet. If you are not sure if you should follow this diet, check with your doctor, nurse, or dietitian.

### *General tips:*

- Avoid all fresh fruits and vegetables, including all fresh garnishes. Cooked vegetables and canned fruits and juices are fine.
- Avoid raw or rare-cooked meat, fish, and eggs. Meat should be cooked to the “well-done” stage. All eggs should be thoroughly cooked (no runny yolks).
- Avoid salad bars, fruit bars, and deli counters. Buy vacuum-packed lunch meats rather than freshly sliced meats.
- Avoid dry fruit and raw nuts. You may eat baked products with these ingredients.
- Make sure all of the dairy products you eat are pasteurized.
- Avoid yogurt and yogurt products with live and active cultures.
- Be safe in the way you handle foods. Wash your hands when handling food. Wash all cutting boards and cutting utensils thoroughly. Keep hot food, hot and cold food, cold. (See UPMC Health System’s “Food Safety Facts” sheet for more information.)
- At home, you may use tap water. If you choose to use bottled water, be sure it is labeled as follows:
  - reverse osmosis *or*
  - distillation *or*
  - filtered through an absolute 1 micron or smaller filter
- Well water is OK if it is boiled for at least 1 minute.
- Absolute neutrophil count (ANC) is a good indication of the body’s ability to defend itself against infection. Your doctor will do this test routinely. When your ANC is greater than 500 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, you can go back to eating a regular diet. But you should always follow basic food safety tips.

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Drinks	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- instant and brewed decaf or regular coffee and tea</li> <li>- individual cans or bottles of carbonated beverages</li> <li>- tap water or bottled water</li> <li>- brewed herbal teas</li> <li>- all canned, bottled and powdered beverages and sports drinks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- any others, such as cold brewed tea or sun tea</li> </ul>

Milk Products	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- pasteurized milk; fat-free milk, 2% milk, whole milk, buttermilk, or chocolate milk</li> <li>- sour cream</li> <li>- milkshakes using individual cartons of ice cream and milk</li> <li>- commercial eggnog</li> <li>- commercial supplements such as instant breakfast drinks</li> <li>- commercial frozen milkshakes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- unpasteurized milk or yogurt</li> <li>- milkshakes made with non-commercial ice cream or made in a blender</li> <li>- yogurt or soft ice cream from a machine</li> <li>- eggnog made with raw eggs</li> <li>- yogurt and yogurt products made with live and active cultures</li> </ul>

Breads and Crackers	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individually packaged bread, rolls, donuts, sweet rolls, etc.</li> <li>- well-cooked pancakes and waffles</li> <li>- French toast</li> <li>- fruit muffins</li> <li>- English muffins</li> <li>- single-serving packages of potato chips, corn chips, tortilla chips, pretzels, crackers, or popcorn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- any others</li> <li>- breads with raw nuts</li> </ul>

Cereals	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cooked cereal</li> <li>- individually packaged cold cereals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- any others</li> <li>- cereals containing nuts and dried fruit</li> </ul>

Desserts	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cakes, pies, and cookies</li> <li>- baked custard, pudding, and gelatin</li> <li>- commercial ice cream, sherbet, fruit ice, and Popsicles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cakes with raw nuts</li> <li>- soft ice cream or yogurt from a machine</li> <li>- non-commercial or homemade ice cream or sherbet</li> <li>- cream pies</li> </ul>

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<b>Eggs</b>	<b>Foods to Choose</b>	<b>Foods to Avoid</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- eggs, well-done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- raw eggs</li> <li>- eggs not well-cooked, such as sunny-side-up</li> </ul>

<b>Fats</b>	<b>Foods to Choose</b>	<b>Foods to Avoid</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- butter or margarine</li> <li>- cream cheese, sour cream, salad dressings, or mayonnaise</li> <li>- oil</li> <li>- shortening used in cooking</li> <li>- non-dairy creamers</li> <li>- nuts (used in cooking only)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- avocado dressing</li> <li>- raw nuts</li> <li>- fresh salad dressing containing aged cheese, raw eggs, or fresh herbs</li> </ul>

<b>Fruits</b>	<b>Foods to Choose</b>	<b>Foods to Avoid</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- canned fruits and juices</li> <li>- individual frozen juices</li> <li>- pasteurized cider and apple juice</li> <li>- thick-skinned fruits such as apples, raw bananas, grapefruit, and oranges that are peeled by a nurse or family member*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- all fresh fruits and juices</li> <li>- all frozen fruits</li> <li>- raisins, coconut, or other dried fruit, unless used in cooking</li> </ul>

\* These foods may be restricted during severe neutropenia and during your hospital stay.

<b>Meat, Fish, and Poultry</b>	<b>Foods to Choose</b>	<b>Foods to Avoid</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- well-cooked meat, fish, poultry, or substitutes</li> <li>- single-serving cooked, canned, or frozen products (nothing raw)</li> <li>- tuna or chicken salad (with no raw vegetables)</li> <li>- cooked baked beans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- rare or medium-rare cooked meat, fish, or poultry</li> <li>- stir-fried foods</li> <li>- cold cuts</li> <li>- cold meat or poultry</li> <li>- fast-food</li> </ul>

<b>Cheese</b>	<b>Foods to Choose</b>	<b>Foods to Avoid</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individually packaged cheese</li> <li>- pasteurized cottage cheese</li> <li>- processed cheese</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- unpasteurized (natural) cheese</li> <li>- blue or Roquefort cheese</li> </ul>

<b>Vegetables</b>	<b>Foods to Choose</b>	<b>Foods to Avoid</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- all well-cooked canned, frozen or fresh vegetables</li> <li>- canned vegetable juices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- all raw vegetables</li> <li>- stir-fried vegetables</li> <li>- fresh salads</li> <li>- fresh sauerkraut</li> </ul>

Potatoes and Substitutes	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- cooked white or sweet potatoes and yams</li> <li>- Tater Tots and hashed brown potatoes</li> <li>- french fries</li> <li>- noodles, spaghetti, macaroni, or other pasta</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- uncooked potatoes or pasta</li> <li>- potato or pasta salad</li> <li>- salads with raw vegetables or eggs</li> </ul>

Soups	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- canned and homemade soup (heated well)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- any others</li> </ul>

Sweets	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- candy in individually sealed wrappers</li> <li>- jam and jelly</li> <li>- pasteurized honey and syrup</li> <li>- chocolate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- unsealed candy</li> <li>- candy with nuts or raisins</li> </ul>

Miscellaneous	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- individual packages of salt, sugar, and pepper used after cooking</li> <li>- all other herbs or seasonings added during cooking</li> <li>- special low-sodium seasoning added during cooking</li> <li>- gravy and cream sauce</li> <li>- commercial peanut butter</li> <li>- commercial pickles processed in jars or cans</li> <li>- Lactaid drops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- spices, herbs, or seasonings added to foods after cooking (except for allowed items)</li> <li>- uncanned or home-canned pickles and Kosher pickles</li> <li>- freshly-made peanut butter</li> <li>- hollandaise sauce</li> </ul>

Dietary Supplements	Foods to Choose	Foods to Avoid
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- commercial high-calorie/ high-protein drinks, puddings, and snack bars if approved by physician or nurse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- supplements and vitamins (unless approved by physician or nurse)</li> </ul>



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SYS08602-2X JS/JW REV 06/02  
Form # 6023-82190-0602

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