

Daily Camera Article – April 2016
Clean house, careful food prep help keep chemo patients healthy
By Michele Hanley – Grillo Health Information Center

Q. How can I help protect my husband from getting an infection while he is undergoing chemotherapy?

A. Your husband will receive detailed instructions from his healthcare team on how to protect himself against infections during chemotherapy treatment. But when you have a family member living at home and receiving outpatient chemo, hygiene must be a family affair. Infectious disease experts at the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tell us the best way to protect the patient is by being scrupulously clean.

The entire family should be fanatic about hand washing. And don't skimp. You ought to have time to sing the entire *Happy Birthday* song while you wash your hands with warm water and soap.

Keep all household surfaces clean. Pets can be therapeutic but clean up their messes right away and disinfect the surface where the mess was. Whoever does this (not the patient!) should wash their hands immediately afterwards.

Stay away from sick people or people who have recently been ill and avoid crowds. This can be challenging if you have children in school or daycare or a family member who works with the public.

Be especially vigilant about food preparation. Fresh fruits and vegetables are healthy, but be sure and wash them before serving to the patient. Produce is shipped in from all over the world and we seldom know the conditions under which it was raised, harvested, and transported. Even if it came from a local farmer and you purchased it at your neighborhood farmer's market, you don't know who touched it before you. So wash it.

Handle raw meat (particularly poultry) carefully to prevent cross-contamination on your cutting boards and food prep areas. Cook it thoroughly. This is not the time for sushi or rare steak.

Do not share food, cups, or other personal care items among family members. No drinking straight out of that milk carton!

You can further help your spouse by watching for signs and symptoms that might indicate an infection. Provide him with simple, helpful items like soft toothbrushes, Peridex mouthwash, an electric shaver, and unscented skin lotion.

Environmental health professionals say, "You need your daily dose of dirt." It means a little "dirt" helps maintain our immune systems. However, this is not the case when someone is already weak from being on chemo. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reports that 60,000 cancer patients each year in the U.S. have to be hospitalized due to serious infections, and one out of fourteen of those hospitalized patients will die. You don't want your loved one to be among them.

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Michele Hanley is a Grillo volunteer and owner of MedSavvy Health Advocates LLC. The Grillo Health Information Center offers free and confidential research to help improve health decisions. If you have a health question, please contact the Grillo Center in person at 4715 Arapahoe Ave, by phone 720-854-7293, or online at www.GrilloCenter.org. No research or assistance should be interpreted as medical advice. We encourage informed consultation with your physician or medical practitioner.

Where to Find It

<http://www.preventcancerinfections.org/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/preventinfections/pdf/neutropenia.pdf>

<http://www.dana-farber.org/Health-Library/Mouth-care-for-cancer-patients.aspx>