

# HEALTH TIP SHEET

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## CARING FOR YOUR PET



### Germ and Your Pet

Pets can be a great source of joy, laughter, excitement, and unconditional love. For some owners, pets are considered a part of the family. Studies have shown that pets can reduce stress and anxiety, and can help improve your overall mood.

Normally, your immune system makes sure that germs carried by your pet do not make you sick, but when you are undergoing chemotherapy, your immune system is weaker than usual. During this time, there are a few things to consider when caring for your pet.

### Caring for Your Pet

These steps may help prevent germs carried by your pet from entering your body through scratches on your skin or through contact with your mouth (either directly or indirectly from your hands).

- Protect your skin from direct contact with pet bodily waste (urine or feces) by wearing vinyl or household cleaning gloves when cleaning up after your pet. Wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- Cover your hand with a plastic bag or vinyl or household cleaning glove to pick up waste when walking your dog and wash your hands thoroughly as soon as you return home.
- Keep your cat's litter box away from eating areas. If possible, have someone else change the litter pan. If you must change the litter, wear vinyl or household cleaning gloves, and wash your hands immediately afterwards.
- Wash your hands with soap and water after playing with or caring for pets, especially before eating or handling food.
- Avoid being scratched or bitten by your pet. If you do get scratched or bitten, immediately wash the wounds well with soap and water.
- Stop your pet from licking your mouth or any open cuts or wounds you may have.
- Keep your pet clean and take your pet to the veterinarian for regular check-ups and vaccinations.

During your nadir, the period of time beginning 7–12 days after you finish each chemotherapy dose—and possibly lasting up to one week—is when you may be at the greatest risk for infection, you should avoid cleaning up after your pet, if possible. During this time, you might ask a friend or relative to take over these chores.

### What is Nadir?

Chemotherapy treatment will usually involve a number of chemotherapy doses (sometimes called cycles). The period of time beginning 7–12 days after you finish each chemotherapy dose—and possibly lasting up to one week—is when you have the fewest white blood cells in your body. Because of this, it will be extra hard for your body to fight off germs during this time.

This period of time is sometimes referred to as nadir, which means “lowest point”. For example, if you have chemotherapy on August 7, you are at highest risk of picking up an infection between August 14 and August 19. This period varies slightly depending upon the chemotherapy drug, or combination of drugs, used.

### What Can You Do During Your Nadir?

- Find out from your doctor and/or nurse exactly when your white blood cell count will be at its lowest.
- Be extra careful during this time.
- Try to remember to take your temperature every evening, and call your doctor if you have a temperature of 100.4°F or higher for more than 1 hour, or a one-time temperature of 101°F or higher.

**If you are receiving chemotherapy, you may be at risk for getting an infection. Take the right steps toward preventing infections during cancer treatment by visiting [www.PreventCancerInfections.org](http://www.PreventCancerInfections.org)**



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