

Complete Blood Count (CBC)

The most common lab test done during treatment is called a complete blood count, or CBC.

A CBC tells your cancer care team about the cells in your blood. It measures 3 basic types of blood cells:

- Red blood cells
- White blood cells
- Platelets

Each kind of cell has a special purpose. And each can be harmed by cancer and cancer treatments.

White Blood Cells (WBCs)

WBCs fight infection. There are many types of white blood cells and each fights infection in a special way. The most important infection-fighting WBC is the neutrophil (NEW-truh-fil). The number doctors look at is called your absolute neutrophil count (ANC). A healthy person has an ANC between 2,500 and 6,000.

When the ANC drops below 1,000 it is called neutropenia (new-truh-PEEN-e-uh). Your doctor will watch your ANC closely. The risk of infection is much higher when the ANC is below 500.

Red Blood Cells (RBCs)

RBCs carry oxygen to and carbon dioxide away from the cells in your body. The CBC measures red blood cells in many ways, but the simplest measure is either:

- hemoglobin (Hgb), the part of each RBC that carries iron –or–
- hematocrit (Hct), the percent of RBCs in the blood

When the Hgb and Hct values fall too low, it's called anemia (uh-NEE-me-uh). Anemia may cause fatigue, pale skin, dizziness, shortness of breath, and a fast heartbeat.

Platelets (PLTs)

Platelets help control bleeding. You may bruise or bleed easily when your platelet levels are low. Platelets in a healthy person range from 150,000-450,000. When your platelet count falls below normal, it's called thrombocytopenia (throm-bo-SY-tuh-PEEN-e-uh). The risk of serious bleeding goes up when platelet levels drop below 20,000, and a transfusion may be needed.