

Bleeding and Low Platelet Count

What it is and why it occurs

Platelets are cells that make your blood clot when you bleed. Cancer treatment can lower the number of platelets because it changes your bone marrow's ability to make them.

A low platelet count is called **thrombocytopenia (THROM-boh-sy-toh-PEE-nee-uh)**. This problem may cause bruises even when you have not been hit or bumped into something, bleeding, or a rash of tiny red or purple dots. Your doctor may delay your treatment or order a platelet transfusion if your platelet count is too low.

Ways to prevent bleeding if your platelet count is low

Self-care

- Apply gentle but firm pressure to any cuts until the bleeding stops.
- Brush your teeth with a very soft toothbrush. Soften the bristles of your toothbrush by running hot water over them before you brush.
- Do not use dental floss, water flossers or toothpicks.
- Blow your nose gently with your mouth open.
- Be careful when using scissors, knives, tools, or other sharp objects.
- Use an electric shaver instead of a razor.
- Tell your doctor or nurse if you are constipated or straining to have a bowel movement. They may suggest taking a stool softener and/or laxative.
- Do not use tampons, enemas, suppositories or rectal thermometers.
- Do not wear clothes with tight collars, wrists or waistbands.

Activity

- Make sure your home is safe so you do not fall. Use nonskid rugs and nightlights. If you are not steady on your feet, use a cane or walker.
- Protect your hands and feet. Wear gloves if working in the yard and use an emery board to file nails. Wear shoes all the time, even inside the house or hospital.
- Avoid lifting heavy objects.
- Do not play sports or do other activities during which you could get hurt

Check with your cancer doctor or nurse before:

- Drinking beer, wine, or other types of alcohol.
- Taking vitamins, herbs, minerals, dietary supplements, aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), naproxen (Aleve) or other medicines. Some of these products can change how cancer treatment drugs work or cause bleeding problems.
- Taking acetaminophen (Tylenol). Ask if it's safe for you to take this medicine for pain relief.
- Having sex. If they say you can have sex, use a water-soluble lubricant for sex. Avoid sexual activity that may harm your skin or cause bleeding. Do not have sex if your platelet count is less than 50K (50,000).
- Seeing your dentist.

If you are bleeding from a cut:

1. Stay calm. Put a clean cloth over the cut and apply steady direct pressure for 10 to 15 minutes. If the dressing is saturated, do not remove it. Put more bandages on top of it.
2. Lay down and put the area that is bleeding above heart or head level. Applying an ice pack can help control bleeding.
3. If bleeding is uncontrolled call 911. If bleeding does not stop after 10 minutes of direct pressure, call your doctor or nurse right away or go to the nearest ER (emergency room).

If you have a nosebleed:

1. Call your doctor's office.
2. Sit upright with head slightly tilted forward.
3. Apply ice and constant hard pressure for 15 minutes by pinching the soft part of your nose, just above your nostrils.
4. Do not pack your nose with tissues.
5. If bleeding stops, do not blow your nose right away.
6. If bleeding does not stop and you can't reach your doctor, go to the nearest ER (emergency room). You may need a platelet transfusion if bleeding does not stop.

Call your doctor or nurse right away if you have:

- easy bruising, especially if you have not been hit or bumped into anything
- tiny pinpoint-sized red or purple spots on your skin. These spots are called petechiae (peh-TEK-key-ee).
- Bleeding problems such as:
 - blood in your urine (pee) or red, brown, or pink urine
 - blood in your bowel movements or bowel movements are black
 - bleeding from your gums, nose or rectal area (bottom)
 - bleeding from a cut for more than 10 minutes after you apply pressure
 - soaking 1 or more large size pads or tampons with blood each hour
 - swelling or bleeding that happens more than 24 hours after bleeding is under control
- swelling or a warm or hot feeling in your arm or leg
- signs of infection such as fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or higher, chills, skin swelling, redness/red streaks on skin, warmth, drainage and/or pain



Call 911 right away if have any of these problems:



- uncontrolled bleeding
- coughing or throwing up blood
- vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- sudden, severe headache, confusion or mood changes like being agitated or very irritable
- changes in eyesight
- feeling dizzy or very sleepy
- heavy bleeding or bleeding from a large open wound
- signs of shock from blood loss such as pale, cold, clammy skin, fast pulse or heart feels like it's racing, changes in eyesight, and/or feeling faint or lightheaded

This info is a general resource. It is not meant to replace your doctor's advice.
Ask your doctor or health care team any questions. Always follow their instructions.