

Thrombocytopenia (Low Platelet Count)

This *Health Facts for You* discusses how to care for a low platelet count. Platelets (Plts) are blood cells that help the blood in our bodies to clot to prevent bleeding.

A normal platelet count is 160,000 – 370,000 (160-370 K/uL).

Thrombocytopenia (Low platelet count) is when the platelet count is below 100,000 (100 K/uL).

Symptoms

Symptoms may not appear unless the platelet count is very low (less than 10,000 – 20,000 [10-20 K/uL]). Symptoms may include:

- Easy or excessive bruising
- Prolonged bleeding
- Bleeding from the gums, mouth or nose
- Petechiae (little red spots under the skin - like freckles)
- Black tarry stools
- Blood in stool or rectal bleeding
- Blood in urine (cloudy to pink to red)
- Coughing up or vomiting up blood
- Enlarged spleen
- Heavy menstrual flow

Treatment Options

If your thrombocytopenia and symptoms are mild, you may not need treatment. If you need treatment, your provider may order one or more treatments based on the cause of your thrombocytopenia. Options include:

1. Platelet transfusions
2. Medicines that stop your body from destroying platelets
3. Medicines to help your body make more platelets

4. Surgery to remove spleen
5. Stopping the treatment that is causing thrombocytopenia

Activity

Keep your floor clear to prevent tripping or falling. **Avoid** activities that could cause an injury, slip, or fall, such as contact sports and climbing ladders.

Ask your doctor or nurse if sex is safe with your blood counts. If you can have sex, use a water-soluble lubricant (K-Y Jelly®) to help reduce trauma to the vaginal tissues.

Personal Health

Use a soft toothbrush to brush your teeth. Carefully floss or avoid flossing. **Avoid** using a blade when shaving. Use an electric razor instead.

Blow your nose very gently. Use saline nasal spray or petroleum jelly to keep nostrils moist.

Avoid constipation. Use stool softeners, eat a high fiber diet, and drink plenty of fluids.

Bleeding

You will need to apply pressure to the site for five minutes when you have:

- Blood draws
- A scrape/cut

For a nosebleed, pinch the soft part of your nose, just above the nostrils, for 10-15 minutes or until the bleeding stops. **Do not** tilt your head backwards.

Medicine

Use acetaminophen (Tylenol®) for minor pain, as this does not affect how your platelets work.

Avoid:

- Aspirin and products that contain aspirin.
- Non-steroidal inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs). These include:
 - Ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®)
 - Naproxen (Aleve®)

When to Call

Call your doctor if you notice:

- Dark red or bright red vomit
- Red or black stools
- Prolonged bleeding that cannot be stopped
- Dizziness/lightheadedness
- Balance problems
- New onset of confusion
- Prolonged headache does not go away with medicine

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2025 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4493