

Bleeding Precautions for Patients with Thrombocytopenia (Low Platelet Count)

Bone marrow is the spongy tissue inside most bones such as those in your hip and thigh. Here, immature cells, also called stem cells, will become:

- Red blood cells (*RBCs* or erythrocytes) that bring oxygen to all your cells
- White blood cells (*WBCs* or leukocytes) that fight infection
- **Platelets (*PLTs* or thrombocytes) that help with normal blood clotting**

Traditional chemotherapy medications attack cells that multiply (reproduce) quickly - and cancer cells do multiply rapidly. Unfortunately, there are some types of normal cells that also multiply quickly and they can be harmed by chemotherapy - including bone marrow. If the number of cells is reduced, your blood counts can drop - including your platelet count.

A low platelet count is called **thrombocytopenia** because the medical term for platelet is thrombocyte. A normal platelet count is around 150,000–450,000. A count higher than 100,000 is good for patients who are receiving chemotherapy.

Platelets help blood clot and prevent bleeding. If your platelet count drops too low, you may bleed easily or bleed for a longer time than you would if your platelet count was normal.

How to take care of yourself if your platelets are low

- Look for unexplained bruises, especially on your legs.
- Try not to bump or cut yourself. Be careful with knives and other sharp instruments.
- If you develop bleeding, place pressure over the area for 5–10 minutes with ice.
- Use a soft tooth brush for mouth care. If you have bleeding, ask your doctor or nurse if you should use something softer than a toothbrush to clean your teeth.
- Do not use aspirin or products that have aspirin in them. Check drug labels or ask your pharmacist if a drug contains acetylsalicylic acid or ASA.
- Take any steroid medications such as prednisone or dexamethasone (Decadron®) with milk, food, or an antacid to avoid irritation or bleeding in your stomach.

How to take care of yourself if your platelets are low (con't)

- Use an electric shaver rather than a razor with blades for shaving.
- Avoid constipation—when straining to have a bowel movement, you may cause small tears in the anus or lining of the lower intestine. This could start bleeding problems.
- Do not use suppositories, enemas, or a rectal thermometer
- Avoid bending over with your head lower than your waist.
- Do not strenuously blow your nose or cough.

Tell your doctor or nurse...

- if you have a nose bleed
- if you see blood in your bowel movement, urine, sputum, or in your vomitus
- if you have any vision changes
- if you notice popped blood vessels in your eyes
- if you have sudden onset of headache or dizziness
- if you have headaches that are not relieved with Tylenol®
- if you notice petechiae—little red/purple blood blisters under your skin, especially on your legs or abdomen
- if bleeding continues after putting pressure on the area for 10–15 minutes

If you have a major injury or continued bleeding, call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.