

What to Do for Low Platelet Counts

A platelet is a type of blood cell that helps your blood clot and stop bleeding when you're injured. If you have low platelets, it's called **thrombocytopenia**. This condition may cause you to bruise or bleed easily. You may also have joint or muscle pain.



What causes low platelet counts?

Many things can cause low platelet counts. These include:

- Cancer treatment, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy
- Certain cancers, such as leukemia and lymphoma
- Disorders that affect the bone marrow
- Health problems like lupus, cirrhosis, or hepatitis
- Infections, such as Epstein-Barr virus and HIV
- Medicines, like nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), aspirin, and some antibiotics



What are the signs and symptoms of low platelet counts?

Some common signs and symptoms of low platelet counts are:

- Bleeding for no known reason
- More or worse bruises than usual
- Small red or purple dots on your skin (petechiae)
- Menstrual bleeding worse than a normal period



How are low platelet counts treated?

Treating low platelet counts depends on the cause. Treatment may include:

- A platelet transfusion
- A change or break in a treatment if it is the cause
- Treatment of a health problem if it is the cause
- Certain medicines or procedures to stop bleeding



What can you do to help manage low platelet counts?

If your platelet count is low, you can help prevent bleeding problems.

- Avoid doing things that could cause an injury, slip, or fall.
- Use a soft toothbrush. Ask your cancer care team if it's OK to floss.
- Use an electric shaver (not a razor blade).
- Always wear shoes when you're outside.
- Be extra careful with sharp objects like knives.
- Use a stool softener to help prevent constipation and hemorrhoids.
- Don't put anything in your rectum (like enemas or thermometers).
- Don't blow your nose or cough forcefully.
- Avoid medicines that thin the blood unless your cancer care team says you need to take them. This includes aspirin and NSAIDs.
- Tell your cancer care team about all prescription and over-the-counter medicines you're taking. Also, tell them about any supplements, vitamins, or herbs you're using. These can affect the blood.



When to talk with your cancer care team

Talk with your cancer care team if you:

- Have bleeding from your nose or gums, or blood in your stool or urine
- Have dark brown or bright red vomit
- Have red or black stools
- Are dizzy, lightheaded, or off-balance



When to call 911 or go to the ER

Call 911 or go to the ER if you:

- Have severe headaches or blurred vision
- Have bleeding that won't stop
- Have new or worse confusion
- Fall or hit your head while your platelets are low



To learn more about managing low platelet counts, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org/thrombocytopenia or call us at **1-800-227-2345**. We're here when you need us.