

Preventing Bleeding When You Have a Low Platelet Count

What is a low platelet count?

A platelet count measures the number of platelets you have in your blood. Platelets are made in the bone marrow and they help your blood clot. The term **Thrombocytopenia** means a low platelet count. A low platelet count may have a number of causes, including certain medicines, some types of cancer, chemotherapy treatments, or kidney disease.

If your platelets are very low, you are at risk to bruise or bleed. It is very important for you to follow the directions from your doctor about when to take bleeding precautions.

What does a platelet count mean?

A **normal** platelet count is **150,000 - 400,000**. On a lab report, these numbers may be shown as **150 - 400 K/uL**.

- If you have a platelet count of **50,000 or less**, you are at risk for bleeding.
- If your platelet count goes below **20,000**, you have a **higher risk** of bleeding. Your doctor will tell you if you need a platelet transfusion.
- If your platelets are low, a platelet transfusion may be needed before any surgery, dental or medical procedures.

What safety tips should I follow when I have a low platelet count?

Here is a list of ways to help protect yourself when you have a low platelet count. **These safety guidelines are most helpful if you have a platelet count of 50,000 or less.**

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- **General Tips**

- ▶ **It is important** to tell your doctor if you are taking a blood thinner (anticoagulant) medicine such as Coumadin, Lovenox, Fragmin, Arixtra, Xarelto, Eliquis or Pradaxa.
- ▶ **Talk with your doctor about your use of** aspirin or products with aspirin. Your doctor may ask you to stop taking these medicines. Ask your pharmacist if you are not sure if a medicine or product has aspirin in it.
- ▶ **Do not** take any anti-inflammatory drugs such as ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve).
- ▶ **Do not** take any drugs or herbal and dietary supplements without first checking with your doctor. This includes medicines you buy over the counter and herbal remedies. Some of these can change the way your platelets work.
- ▶ Make your home a safe environment to prevent falls. Ask for the handout **Safety Tips to Prevent Falls at Home**.
- ▶ Ask for help with walking if you are not steady on your feet.
- ▶ **Do not** play sports or do other activities where you could get hurt.
- ▶ Talk to your doctor and health care team to see if you need a platelet transfusion before any surgery, dental or medical procedures.
- ▶ When your platelets are 50,000 or less, **do not** have sex (oral, anal, or vaginal).
- ▶ Women should **not** use tampons or douche.
- ▶ If you drink alcohol, ask your doctor if you need to limit the amount that you drink.

- **Protect Your Skin**

- ▶ Use an electric razor for shaving.
- ▶ Use a file for nail care.
- ▶ Do not have manicures, pedicures, waxing or tattoos.
- ▶ Check your skin every day for new cuts, bruises or other injuries.
- ▶ Watch for a **red rash (petechiae)** on your skin. This rash looks like tiny red dots.
- ▶ **Do not** use sharp tools like scissors, knives or needles.

- ▶ **Do not** wear tight-fitting clothes, elastic sleeves or rough fabrics.
- ▶ Do not go barefoot.
- ▶ **Do not** do activities where you could fall or get bumps and cuts.
- ▶ **Do not** do gardening.
- ▶ Put ice on new bruises or injuries. Put firm pressure on any cuts for at least 5 minutes. **Call your doctor if the bruise gets bigger or bleeding does not stop.**
- **Protect The Inside of Your Mouth**
 - ▶ Eat soft foods.
 - ▶ **Do not** eat crusty or rough foods such as nuts, crackers, chips or pretzels which may cut the inside of the mouth.
 - ▶ Keep your lips moist. Use a lip moisturizer to prevent dry or cracked lips.
 - ▶ Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush.
 - ▶ If you cannot use a toothbrush, you may use a sponge swab (toothette) to clean your teeth and gums.
 - ▶ Talk with your doctor and your dentist before you have any dental work done.
 - ▶ **Do not** use dental floss, an electric toothbrush, or toothpicks.
 - ▶ Dentures or retainers should fit properly. Remove these to give your mouth a rest at least 8 hours a day.
 - ▶ Check your mouth every day for bleeding gums.
- **Protect Your Nose and Throat**
 - ▶ Use a humidifier to add moisture in the air, especially if you have the heat on in your home. Be careful to follow proper cleaning practices for your humidifier, especially if you have been told that you are also at risk for infection.
 - ▶ **Do not** blow your nose hard.
 - ▶ **Do not** cough too hard.
 - ▶ Watch for nosebleeds, especially after sneezing.

If you have a nosebleed:

- Pinch your nostrils together. Put ice on your nose and on the back of your neck.
- Sit with your head and body leaning forward. Do not lie down or put your head back.
- If the bleeding lasts more than **5 minutes**, call your doctor.

- **Protect Your Stomach and Bowels**

- ▶ If you take steroid medicines, take this medicine with food or an antacid to help protect your stomach.
- ▶ If you have nausea, ask your doctor for medicine to prevent vomiting.
- ▶ Exercise can help prevent constipation. Walking is a very good exercise.
- ▶ Eat foods high in fiber to prevent constipation. Ask your health care team for a list of foods high in fiber.
- ▶ Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluids (caffeine-free) each day to help prevent constipation.
- ▶ **Do not strain** when having a bowel movement. Talk to your doctor before using a stool softener or a laxative.
- ▶ **Do not** use enemas, suppositories or rectal thermometer.

Call your doctor right away if you have any of the following:

- Put firm pressure on any bleeding from a cut or injury. If the bleeding does not stop after 5 minutes call your doctor.
- Blood in vomit or vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- Severe stomachache
- Coughing up blood
- Blurred vision
- Severe headache, confusion, weakness or numbness
- Bowel movements that are red or black like tar
- Blood in your urine (red or pink in color)

- Unusual or heavy bleeding from your gums
- Menstrual bleeding or a period that is much heavier or lasts much longer than normal
- Vaginal bleeding
- Red rash (petechiae)
- Unusual bruises, bleeding and swelling