

LOW PLATELET COUNTS

Platelets, also called thrombocytes, are disk-shaped cells in the blood whose job is to stop bleeding through clotting and promote wound healing. When platelets encounter a leaking blood vessel they begin the clotting process by releasing chemicals that help coagulate, or clot, the blood. Certain types of cancer as well as several drugs used for chemotherapy interfere with platelet production in the bone marrow.

Call your nurse or doctor immediately if you develop signs of low platelet counts. If bleeding begins, apply firm pressure to the site of bleeding for 5 minutes or until the bleeding stops.

Signs of Low Platelet Counts

- Small purple or red spots on the skin, called petechiae
- Blood in the vomit or stool
- Black, tarry stools
- Red or brown urine
- Bruising that occurs easily
- Nosebleeds
- Very heavy periods
- Bleeding from the gums
- Dizziness, constant headache or blurred vision

If You Have Low Platelet Counts

- Use a soft toothbrush (if your counts are severely low, your physician may instruct you to gargle with warm water and salt instead of brushing).
- Do not floss.
- Do not wear dentures if your mouth and gums are irritated.
- Use an electric razor instead of a blade.
- Blow your nose gently.
- Do not use enemas or rectal suppositories.
- Avoid aspirin or aspirin-containing medications.
- Avoid constipation or straining while having a bowel movement.
- Women should not use tampons during menstrual periods.
- Avoid sexual intercourse while platelets are below 50,000.
- Avoid sports, housework, job-related physical tasks.
- Wear gloves when gardening.
- Do not use toothpicks.
- Before buying a prescription or over the counter medicine, tell your pharmacist your platelets may be low.
- Avoid contact sports or other activities that could cause bleeding.
- Avoid lifting anything over 15 pounds.