

Bleeding Problems

Some types of cancers and cancer treatments can cause you to have too few platelets in your blood. Platelets are cells that clump together to clot blood, which stops bleeding when you are hurt. Not having enough platelet cells gives you a higher risk of bruising or bleeding, even without an injury.

What should I do if I have low platelets?

- Use a very soft toothbrush.
- Blow your nose gently with soft tissue. Your healthcare provider may ask you to not blow your nose at all.
- Take extra care to prevent cuts or nicks when using needles, knives, scissors, or tools.
- Switch to an electric razor to avoid the risk of shaving cuts.
- Protect your hands with gloves when gardening.
- Use extra caution near heat sources such as irons, stoves, barbecue grills, and heating pads.
- Tell your health care provider if you are constipated. He or she may recommend a stool softener to be taken orally. Avoid straining to have a bowel movement.

What should I avoid?

- Don't use dental floss or toothpicks.
- Don't pick pimples or scabs.
- Don't play sports that have a risk of getting hurt.
- Don't put anything in your rectum, not even a thermometer or medicine.
- Don't use tampons. Use pads for feminine hygiene.

Talk with your health care provider

- Ask if it is safe for you to take aspirin or products that contain aspirin. Aspirin interferes with the platelets' ability to stop bleeding. It should generally not be used if your platelet count is low.

- Ask if it is safe for you to use pain relievers such as ibuprofen and naproxen (products such as Aleve®, Advil®, Motrin®). Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is usually safe if your platelet count is low, but ask first.
- Tell them all the vitamins, herbal supplements, and over-the-counter medicines you take.
- Check with them before drinking alcohol.

Talk to your doctor or nurse before taking any medicines, vitamins, or herbs.

How are bleeding problems managed?

- You may have more frequent blood tests to monitor the amount of platelets in your blood.
- Your chemotherapy treatment may be delayed while your body builds platelets.
- Your health care provider may prescribe a platelet transfusion to build your platelet level.

When should I call my doctor?

Call if you develop any of these symptoms:

- Black or bloody stools
- Bleeding from your gums
- Blood in the urine, or reddish or pink urine
- Changes in vision
- Easy bruising
- Nosebleeds that do not stop within 15 minutes
- Severe headaches
- Small red spots under the skin
- Vaginal bleeding that is new or lasts longer than your regular period

Doctor's Number: _____