

MANAGING Bleeding

Thrombocytopenia is the term for a low platelet count. Platelets are cells that help your blood clot when you bleed. Chemotherapy treatment can cause you to have a temporarily low platelet count. This often happens seven to 10 days after treatment and gets better within two to six weeks.

You may need treatment if your platelet count is low or if you have any of the symptoms listed below. The most common treatment is a platelet transfusion. Your doctor will check your platelet count closely.

What to watch for with low platelets:

- Bleeding gums with or without brushing your teeth
- Bruising without injury
- Bleeding from nose, mouth or rectum
- Rash with tiny red dots, usually starting on feet and legs
- Pink or red urine
- Black or bloody bowel movements
- More than usual amount of vaginal bleeding during your monthly periods
- Bad headaches, dizziness or blurred vision
- Trouble speaking or moving

Report any of these symptoms to your doctor.

What you can do:

- Brush your teeth with a very soft toothbrush
- Blow your nose gently
- Prevent constipation
- Use an electric razor, no blades for shaving
- Be careful with sharp objects
- Avoid activities that may lead to injuries
- Apply pressure to area after blood draws
- Talk to your doctor or nurse before having sex
- Be very careful when trimming your fingernails or toenails

What not to do:

- Do not use dental floss or toothpicks
- Do not play sports or participate in activities that may cause injury
- Do not use tampons, enemas, suppositories or rectal thermometers
- Do not wear clothing or shoes that are tight fitting
- Do not strain when you have a bowel movement
- Do not blow your nose or cough forcefully
- Do not take anti-inflammatory medicines (such as ibuprofen, naproxen or others with aspirin) unless instructed by your doctor

What to do if you are bleeding:

- For nosebleeds, pinch your nostrils closed while placing ice on the nose. Sit up and lean forward to keep the blood from dripping down your throat. Keep holding your nostrils for five minutes, then let go and check to see if the bleeding has stopped.
- For bleeding from cuts or open areas on skin, apply pressure with towel or cloth until bleeding stops.
- If bleeding does not stop within a few minutes, contact your doctor. For severe bleeding, call 911.

Note: Tell your doctor or nurse if you are having any of the signs and symptoms of bleeding listed in the section "What to watch for with low platelets."

You will find more information in the "Chemotherapy and You" booklet.