



Low Platelet Count

What are platelets?

- There are three main types of cells in your blood: white blood cells, red blood cells and platelets.
- Platelets help your blood to clot. This helps you stop bleeding if you get cut.
- When you do not have enough platelets in your blood, you may bruise or bleed easily even from a small cut or injury.

How do I know if my platelets are low?

- Your complete blood count (routine blood test) shows the number of platelets in your blood.
- Your healthcare team will tell you if you have low platelets.

What to watch for:

If you notice any of these signs of bleeding you need to get medical help right away:

- Bruising easily or more than normal
- Tiny red or purple dots on your skin that may look like a rash
- Unusual or heavy nosebleeds
- Red or pink coloured urine (pee)
- Black coloured stools (poo), or blood in your stools
- Red or brown coloured mucus when you cough
- Blood in your vomit or vomit that looks like coffee-grounds

- Dizziness, constant headache or changes in your vision
- Bleeding from your gums, especially when brushing your teeth
- Heavy vaginal bleeding

Even if you do not feel sick when you have these symptoms, you must contact your healthcare team or go the nearest emergency department right away! You may need a platelet transfusion or a change in your treatment.

What to do when your platelet count is low:

Medications:

- Tell your pharmacist that your platelet count may be low before taking or buying any prescriptions or over-the-counter medication.
- Do not take medications that may increase bleeding risk like ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) or acetylsalicylic acid (ASA, Aspirin).
- Check with your healthcare team to see if acetaminophen (Tylenol®) is okay to take for headache or occasional aches and pains.
- Talk to your doctor if you take aspirin or blood thinners for other medical problems. Do not stop taking them unless your doctor tells you to.

Mouth care:

- Use a soft bristle toothbrush, toothettes, or gauze to gently clean your teeth. Stop flossing if your gums bleed and it lasts for more than 2 minutes.
- Check with your healthcare team before you go to the dentist.

Prevent cuts and bruises:

- Take extra care when using sharp knives, scissors, razors and other sharp items.
- Do not strain when you have a bowel movement. Prevent constipation. If you need a laxative ask your healthcare team to help you choose the right one for you.
- Use a water-based lubricant during sex to reduce the chance of bleeding.
- Use an electric razor to shave instead of a razor blade.
- Do not play contact sports, or do any activities that can cause bruising. Ask your healthcare team what activities are safe for you.
- Blow your nose gently. Too much force could start a nosebleed.
- Do not use rectal thermometers, suppositories or enemas.

Eating and drinking:

- Eat well and drink 6-8 glasses of liquids each day unless your healthcare team tells you otherwise.
- Do not drink alcohol. Alcohol can increase your risk of bleeding.

What to do if you have a small bleed:

Nosebleed:

- Tilt your head forward. Press on both sides of your nose with a cold cloth for at least 10 minutes.

Cuts:

- Clean the area well with soap and water or a saline (saltwater) rinse. Apply firm pressure with a clean cloth for at least 10 minutes.

Gums or mouth:

- Apply gentle pressure on the area or hold ice water in your mouth until the bleeding stops.

Bruises:

- Apply pressure or an ice pack for at least 10 minutes.

If the bleeding doesn't stop, go the nearest emergency department right away.