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# Low Platelet Count

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## 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.

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## 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.**