

Oncology Symptom: Low Platelet Count

What are platelets?

- Platelets are a type of blood cell that helps you to stop bleeding.
- Platelets are made in the bone marrow and carried in the blood.

Why is my platelet count low?

- Your platelet count can drop from the treatments you are getting. These treatments can affect your bone marrow.

What can happen if my platelet count is too low?

- Low platelet count puts you at risk for increased bleeding.

How will I know if I am bleeding too much?

You may notice 1 or more of the following things:

- ✓ Easy bruising
- ✓ Bleeding from your gums or nose
- ✓ Blood in your urine, stool or vomit
- ✓ Black stools
- ✓ Tiny purple dots on your skin
- ✓ Bleeding from old sites where a needle was inserted
- ✓ Sudden, severe headache
- ✓ Heavier flow than normal during your period
- ✓ Bleeding from your vagina in between periods

What should I do if I think I have increased bleeding?

- If you notice any of the signs above, you must **tell your doctor or nurse right away.**

What should I do if I am at risk for increased bleeding?

- ❑ Prevent cuts, scrapes, bumps and falls by avoiding activities that can cause injury.
- ❑ Prevent nicks and cuts by using an electric razor to shave.
- ❑ Use a toothbrush with soft bristles.
- ❑ If you notice bleeding or mouth soreness after you brush your teeth, rinse your mouth with salt water.
 - ✓ You can make salt water at home by mixing 1 teaspoon of table salt in 1 pint of water.
- ❑ If a toothbrush makes your gums bleed, brush your teeth with a foam-tipped swab dipped in salt water instead.
- ❑ Do not floss your teeth if it causes bleeding.
- ❑ Do not blow your nose too hard.
- ❑ Do not take aspirin or drugs that contain aspirin because aspirin increases bleeding. These are some examples of drugs that contain aspirin:
 - ✓ Alka-Seltzer, Anacin, Ascriptin, Bufferin, Ecotrin, Fiorinel, Midol, Percodan, **and many others.**
- ❑ **Always** check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist before taking **any** over-the-counter medication while your platelet count is low.
- ❑ Do not drink alcoholic beverages (including beer and wine) while your platelet count is low.
- ❑ Tell your dentist or any doctor who may treat you for other conditions that your platelet count is low.
- ❑ Do not take injections (needles) unless there is no other choice. If you do need an injection, tell the person giving it to you that your platelet count is low.
- ❑ If you begin to bleed, cover the area with a clean cloth and press down firmly. Call your doctor or nurse if the bleeding does not stop after 5 minutes.