

# Guidelines for Patients with a Low Platelet Count

---

Platelets are colorless cells that are a part of blood. They are produced in bone marrow, the soft, spongy center in most of our large bones. The main function of platelets is to control bleeding. A normal platelet count is 150,000-400,000 platelets per microliter (mcl) of blood.

If your doctor has told you that you have a low platelet count, it is very important that you take precautions to prevent bleeding. You must also recognize any signs of bleeding so you can report them to your doctor or nurse. Precautions and signs of bleeding are listed below. Your platelet count may be low because of the cancer or its treatment.

## **Protective measures to avoid bleeding:**

- Self-Care
  - Avoid sharp objects such as a straightedge razor, scissors, and nail clippers.
  - Use a soft toothbrush.
  - Blow your nose gently, if at all.
- Perineal care
  - Do not use rectal suppositories, enemas, or tampons.
  - Do not take your temperature rectally.
  - Consider using stool softeners or laxatives if you are straining to have bowel movements.
- Dressing
  - Avoid tight clothing such as a girdle and tight undergarments or pants.
- Activities
  - Wear gloves when gardening, cooking, and doing home repairs.
  - Avoid any activity that may result in injury. This includes any
    - Contact sports.
    - Climbing ladders.
    - Strenuous exercise.
    - Bicycling.
    - Weight lifting.
- Sexual activity
  - Use lubrication if needed.
  - Avoid anal or oral intercourse.
  - Avoid strong thrusting.

- Medicines
  - Do not take
    - Aspirin.
    - Products that have aspirin.
    - Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as Advil®.
    - Vitamin E.

Ask for the card that lists common products with these medicines.

- Dental care
  - Speak with your doctor before you have any routine or elective dental work.
- Do not have
  - Manicures.
  - Pedicures.
  - Waxing.
  - Electrolysis.
  - Tattoos.

**Call your doctor if you develop any symptoms of bleeding:**

- Excessive bruising.
- A faint red rash on your trunk, arms, and legs.
- Vaginal spotting or heavy menstrual bleeding.
- The appearance of broken blood vessels in the “white of the eye” (sclera).

**Steps to be taken if bleeding occurs at home:**

1. Apply direct pressure on the bleeding site.
2. After applying pressure, call your MSKCC doctor. If you are unable to reach your doctor, and bleeding does not stop, go to a local emergency room.
3. Apply ice over the bridge of your nose for nosebleeds.

**Call your doctor immediately if you have:**

- Black bowel movements, blood in the stool, or rectal bleeding.
- Blood in your urine.
- Headaches that do not get better, blurred vision, dizziness.
- Any bleeding that does not get better (coughing up blood, vomiting blood, nose bleeds).

Doctor \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Nurse \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

On the evenings or the weekend, call the page operator at (212) 639-7900 and ask for the doctor covering your service.

# Notes



Memorial Sloan-Kettering  
Cancer Center

©1995 Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center  
1275 York Avenue, New York, New York 10065  
Revised 1997, 2002; reviewed 2004, revised 2007