

CANCER TREATMENT & LOW PLATELET COUNT

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What are platelets?

Platelets are the cells in your body that help blood to clot and stop you from bleeding. Certain chemotherapy drugs and radiation therapy may temporarily decrease the number of these cells in your blood. If this happens, you may bleed or bruise more easily.

What can be done to decrease my risk of bleeding?

- Avoid any activity that may cause injury such as gardening, strenuous exercise, contact sports, job related physical tasks and heavy house cleaning.
- Avoid blowing your nose forcefully or sneezing forcefully.
- Only use electric razors when shaving.
- Wear shoes or slippers to avoid injury to the foot.
- Do not strain when having a bowel movement. You may need to ask your doctor for a laxative if this is a problem.
- Do not bend over with your head lower than your shoulders. Bend from the knees and keep your head up.
- Check with your doctor before using enemas, suppositories, douches or tampons.
- Do not take your temperature rectally.
- Do not cut, bite or tear cuticles or nails.
- Hold pressure on any cut or scrape for at least 5 minutes.
- If you have blood work drawn, apply pressure to site for at least 5 minutes. Let the blood drawer know that you have a low platelet count.

Are there any concerns with dental work?

- Speak with your doctor or nurse before having dental work during chemotherapy, especially cleaning.
- Be sure to use a soft toothbrush.
- Ask your doctor or nurse before using dental floss because it could cause your gums to bleed.
- If your gums bleed, rinse with cold water. If bleeding does not stop call your doctor.

Are there medications that may increase my risk of bleeding?

There are several medications that can increase your risk for bleeding. Take only those medications your doctor has prescribed. Over the counter medications that can cause bleeding include:

- Ibuprofen (Motrin or Advil) or ibuprofen containing products.
- Naproxen (Aleve)
- Aspirin or aspirin/salicylate-containing products, such as Alka Seltzer, Pepto Bismo

Check with your doctor or nurse before taking any over the counter medications, herbals or dietary supplements.

When should I call the Physician?

- Bleeding that will not stop after 5 minutes of pressure.
- Bleeding or bruising that occurs spontaneously (by itself), without injury.
- Bleeding from your nose or gums.
- Excessive bruising or any small red/purple spots anywhere on your skin.
- Blood in your urine, bowel movement, or mucus from lungs.
- Headaches that are more severe than usual or are not relieved by medication.
- Dizziness or lightheadedness.
- Fall, trauma or injury.
- Difficulty seeing or double vision.
- Menstrual period that is heavier than usual.
- New or unexplained pain.

If you have been told that your platelet count is low, do not take products with aspirin/salicylate or make dental appointments until speaking with your physician.

Sources: American Cancer Society

Polovich, M., White, J., & Kelleher, L. (Eds.) (2005). *Chemotherapy and biotherapy guidelines and recommendations for practice*. Pittsburg, PA: Oncology Nursing Society.

For more Patient Education Fact Sheets, see the Greenwich Hospital web set at www.greenhosp.org and click on Patients & Visitors, then Patient Education