

Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP)



What is ITP?

Immune thrombocytopenic purpura is a blood disorder in which the immune system destroys platelets soon after they are made by the bone marrow. Platelets are the blood cells needed for normal clotting of the blood. When the platelet count is very low, patients may be at a higher risk for bleeding. This bleeding may occur in response to an injury, a surgery, a procedure, or suddenly with no obvious cause.

What causes ITP?

The exact cause of ITP is not always known. However, it does occur more often in people who already have an autoimmune or inflammatory condition such as lupus or rheumatoid arthritis. ITP in children may occur after a viral infection, and it may be not require treatment. ITP in adults is most often not related to a viral infection. Adults with ITP usually require treatment as the condition does not often resolve on its own. In the majority of cases in adults, there is no known cause of ITP.

What are some signs of ITP?

These signs or symptoms are commonly seen with a decreased platelet count of any cause, but may also be seen with ITP. The amount and severity of symptoms is related to the severity of the decrease in the platelet count.

- Bruising
- Nosebleed or bleeding in your mouth
- For women, abnormally heavy bleeding with menstrual periods
- Tiny pinpoint red or purple dots (**purpura** or **petechiae**) on your skin. This appears as a rash. It can be especially seen on parts of your body where anything is causing pressure (belt line, watch band, sock line)

How is ITP diagnosed?

The diagnosis of ITP is made only after ruling out other possible causes for the decrease in platelets. This is what doctors call a diagnosis of exclusion. There is no diagnostic test to absolutely say a patient has ITP. A person will have a physical exam, have their blood cell counts checked (CBC or complete blood count), and sometimes need a bone marrow biopsy before the doctor concludes that the diagnosis is ITP.

How is ITP treated?

Severe bleeding problems do not usually happen unless a person's platelet count is less than 20,000. If there are no bleeding symptoms, treatment is not needed unless the platelet count is less than 20,000. But if a person does have bleeding problems, treatment may be started even though the platelet count is higher than 20,000.

Many treatments may be used in ITP. Most patients will be treated with prednisone, which is a steroid medication, as a part of the initial therapy. There are many other treatments which may be used to treat a patient with ITP. These include:

- Removal of the spleen (splenectomy)
- An IV (intravenous) medication that treats problems with your immune system (Immunoglobulin)
- Other medications that suppress your immune system

You should discuss these treatment options in detail with your physician to see which may be best for your particular situation.

What can I do to take care of myself?

- Communicate with your doctors. Find out how to take care of your health during treatment
- Tell your doctor if you are taking any other treatments or remedies as these may interact with your treatment
- Follow through with the treatments your doctor has ordered. If you have problems getting to treatments or getting medications, please talk to your health care team
- Visit the Platelet Disorder Support Association's website to learn more about ITP www.pdsa.org

If you would like more written information, please call the Library for Health Information at (614)293-3707. You can also make the request by e-mail: health-info@osu.edu.

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