ITP: Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura

What is ITP?

Idiopathic Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP) is a bleeding disorder. People with ITP can bruise or bleed more easily than normal. ITP is a disease of the blood in which the body’s immune system attacks its own platelets for unknown reasons. The immune system attacks platelets by making proteins (antibodies) which attach to these platelets. They are then removed from the body by the spleen. Normally, when you cut yourself, your platelets rush to this wound and form a clot to stop the bleeding. People with ITP have fewer platelets to form a clot. This causes you to bleed easier.

Types of ITP

There are two types of ITP: acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term)

- **Acute ITP** most often lasts less than 6 months. It occurs mainly in children after a viral illness. This form of ITP often goes away within a few weeks or months and may not require any treatment.

- **Chronic ITP** may last 6 months or longer, and it is the type of ITP that most commonly affects adults. Chronic ITP is 3 times more common in women than men. Treatment depends on bleeding symptoms and your platelet count. Mild cases without bleeding symptoms may not require treatment.

Symptoms of ITP

When you have ITP, you may notice some of these symptoms.

- Tiny, red or purple spots on the skin or lining of your mouth (petechiae). These are caused by bleeding from small blood vessels under the skin.
- Painless, dime-sized bruises on the skin or in the mouth (purpura)
- Nose bleeds
- Bleeding gums
- Heavy menstrual bleeding in women
- Blood in the urine or stool
- Bleeding in the brain. This is rare

Treatment for ITP

- **Children:** ITP often goes away on its own within 6 months. Children do not need treatment unless they have a lot of bleeding or a very low platelet count. Milder cases may only need monitoring of symptoms and blood work to check platelet counts.
- **Adults:** ITP tends to remain in adults, although the severity comes and goes. Medicines and frequent blood work are often needed.
Medicines Used to Treat ITP

- **Steroids** such as prednisone. They help raise the platelet count in the blood by slowing the activity of the immune system. This medicine is given by mouth.
- **Immune globulin** – given intravenously
- **Anti-(Rh) D immunoglobulin** – given intravenously
- **Rituxan® (Rituximab)** – given intravenously
- **Nplate® (Romiplostim)** – given subcutaneously
- **Promacta® (Eltrombopag)** – tablet given by mouth

Other drugs that slow the activity of the immune system may also be necessary.

**Surgery:** If the medicines do not work, your doctor may remove your spleen. Since the platelets get trapped in the spleen, removing it helps to stop the breakdown. If you have your spleen removed, you may be more likely to get infections. Watch for signs of infection such as fever. Get treatment promptly.

**Platelet transfusions** may be needed by people who have severe bleeding.

**Caring for Yourself at Home**

Talk with your doctor or nurse about what activities are safe for you. Also talk about when it is OK for you to return to work. Avoid contact sports. Avoid injury that could cause bruising or bleeding. Be careful to avoid medicines such as aspirin and ibuprofen. They can lower platelet counts and cause bleeding. Be sure to tell your doctor about all medicines that you are taking, including supplements and over-the-counter medications.

Be aware of the symptoms described above. If you notice any of them, be sure to call your doctor. If you have further questions or concerns, call:

Hematology Clinic **(608) 265-1700**
Your Doctor

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If you live out of the area, call **1-800-323-8942** and ask for the Hematology Clinic at extension **5-1700**.