

# Medical Oncology

## Thrombocytopenia Information Sheet

### Thrombocytopenia

Thrombocytopenia is when you do not have enough platelets. Platelets are cells that make your blood clot when you bleed. Chemotherapy can lower the number of platelets because it affects your bone marrow's ability to make them.

#### What are the signs/symptoms of thrombocytopenia?

- Bruising easily
- Tiny, pinpoint-sized red or purple spots on your skin (petechiae)
- Nose bleeds
- Bleeding gums
- Prolonged bleeding from a cut
- Black or bloody stool
- Brown or red urine
- Increased vaginal bleeding
- Headaches or vision changes

#### How can I help lessen or prevent some of the symptoms?

- Avoid over-the-counter aspirin, aspirin containing medicine or NSAIDs (i.e. ibuprofen, naproxen). These medicines prevent platelets from working as they should.
- Use a soft toothbrush. If your gums bleed during brushing, talk to your nurse about other options. Do not floss if platelets are less than 50,000.
- Use an electric shaver rather than a razor.
- When you blow your nose, do it gently.
- If you do start bleeding, apply gentle but firm pressure until the bleeding stops.
- Avoid using enemas, rectal thermometers, and suppositories. Women should not douche or use vaginal tampons or vaginal suppositories.
- Avoid constipation or straining during a bowel movement.
- Avoid wearing tight-fitting clothing including shirts with elastic bands at the waist or on the arms.
- Wear shoes or slippers on your feet whenever walking.
- Avoid cutting with sharp knives or working with sharp blades.
- Avoid contact sports such as football and hockey.
- Speak with your doctor about sexual intercourse. If your platelet count is too low, you should not have sexual intercourse. If you have sexual intercourse, use water-based lubricants as needed.

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### **When should I call my nurse or doctor?**

- If you have bleeding from a procedure or incision site, or blood in your urine or stool, or uncontrolled nosebleed or bleeding gums.
- If you have headaches, extreme drowsiness (unrelated to medicine), confusion, or falls.
- If you notice new petechiae or bruises.

### **Is there a treatment for thrombocytopenia?**

- You may need platelet transfusions if your platelet count is too low or your symptoms are severe.

See the *Chemotherapy and Immunotherapy Patient Guide* book for more information.

If you have questions or concerns, please call your care team at:  
Bronson Cancer Center – Battle Creek 269-245-8660  
Bronson Cancer Center – Kalamazoo 269-286-7170