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Patient information

A Guide to Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura in Children

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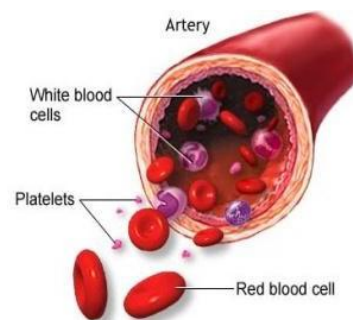
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What is ITP?

Immune thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP), is a blood disorder affecting the platelets. Platelets are one of the three types of blood cell, the others being red and white blood cells. Platelets are small and sticky and their job is to prevent bruising and stop bleeding after an injury. The normal platelet count is between 150 to 400 x 10⁹ /l. In most cases of ITP, the platelet count is less than 20 x 10⁹ /l. A low platelet count is called 'thrombocytopenia'. ITP is a medical term for a condition in which there is bruising (purpura) or bleeding because there are fewer platelets in the blood than usual (thrombocytopenic) and is usually caused by something going wrong with the immune system (the body's defence against infection).



What causes it?

The immune system mistakes platelets as being foreign and attacks the platelets. In many cases this may follow a viral infection or vaccination during which time the immune system attacks the virus, but the immune system then goes on to think that the platelets are viral material and starts to attack the platelets.

How is it treated?

Most children do not need any treatment unless they have severe bleeding. Many children, particularly younger ones, spontaneously improve within six weeks, with or without treatment. All the various forms of treatment aim to temporarily improve the platelet count and do not cure the condition itself. When ITP recovers about one in 20 children will have a further occurrence in the future.

What is my child not allowed to do?

Avoid activities in which your child could be significantly injured (rugby, diving, trampoline, martial arts) especially any impact on the head.

- If your child is hurt, they may bleed more and get bigger bruises,
- Your child should always wear a helmet when riding a bike, scooter, skateboard; or roller skating
- Your child should avoid drugs like aspirin, ibuprofen or herbal medication and IM (intra muscular) injection.

When to seek help?

- When your child has a prolonged nosebleed (over 20 minutes) which will not stop despite pinching the nose or a prolonged gum bleeding,
- If you notice blood in your child's stool or urine,
- Following a heavy blow to your child's head, particularly if your child has been stunned or is vomiting
- If your child develops a persistent or severe headache,
- If your child is vomiting or drowsy.

School

- You should inform your child's head teacher, class teacher and school nurse (you may want to share this leaflet with them).

- Your child should be able to return to school within the next few days if doing well and not needing treatment.

Dentist

- Inform your dentist that your child has ITP,
- Delay treatment if possible,
- Otherwise, you can discuss treatment with your local hospital.

Surgery

- Inform the surgeons that your child has ITP,
- Defer surgery if it is not urgent,
- Discuss treatment and platelet transfusion with your local hospital.

How to contact us

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