

ITP (Low Platelet Count) in Children

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What is ITP?

ITP stands for Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura.

ITP is a problem that causes a low number of platelets in the blood. Platelets are blood cells that help stop bleeding. When a child has less platelets, they may bruise more easily and bleed for longer. Most children with ITP recover completely.

What do platelets do?

Platelets help the blood clot after a cut or injury. A normal platelet count is usually between 150 and 400. In children with ITP, the platelet count may be much lower than this.

What causes ITP?

ITP often starts after a viral illness such as a cold. The body's defence system attacks platelets by mistake and this lowers the platelet count. Doctors do not know exactly why this happens. ITP does not spread from one child to another.

How common is ITP?

ITP is more common in children than in adults. About 1 child in every 10,000 develops ITP each year.

What are the signs of ITP?

Your child may have:

- Small red or purple spots on the skin.
- Easy bruising.
- Large bruises after minor bumps.
- Frequent nosebleeds.
- Bleeding gums.
- Small blood blisters inside the mouth.
- Swelling or a lump after a knock to the head.

Not every child will have all these symptoms.

What tests are needed?

Blood test

Most children only need a blood test to find out if they have ITP.

The test checks:

- Platelet count.
- Red blood cells.
- White blood cells.

Other tests

It is very rare that your child may require extra tests. Your doctor will discuss this with you if required.

How is ITP treated?

Most children do not need treatment. Many children get better on their own within a few weeks or months. Treatment is only needed if bleeding or bruising is serious.

Medicines to avoid

Children with ITP should not take:

- Aspirin.
- Ibuprofen.

These medicines can raise the risk of bleeding.

Paracetamol is safe.

Always ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist before giving new medicines.

Treatment for serious symptoms

If bleeding is serious your child may need treatment.

Possible treatments include:

Steroids

Steroids can help raise the platelet count for a short time.

Immunoglobulin

Your child will receive this treatment through a drip into a vein. It can raise the platelet count. Your doctor will explain how the treatment works and possible side effects.

Daily life and sport

Most children with ITP can carry on with their normal daily life.

They should:

- Attend school.
- Join school trips.
- Play with friends.

If the platelet count is very low, your doctor may advise avoiding:

- Rugby.
- Boxing.
- Martial arts.
- Other contact sports.

Your healthcare team will tell you what is safe for your child to do.

When should I seek medical advice?

Contact your hospital team or seek urgent medical help if your child has:

- A nosebleed lasting more than 30 minutes.
- Bleeding from the gums that will not stop.
- Blood in the urine.
- Blood in the stool (poo).
- Vomiting after a head injury.
- Difficulty to wake after a head injury.
- A bad or long-lasting headache.

What to expect

Short-term ITP

Most children recover fully within 2 to 3 months. Some children may start to get symptoms again after another sickness.

Long-term ITP

A small number of children have ITP for longer than 12 months. If this happens, your doctor will discuss further treatment and follow-up.

Further help and support

ITP Support group

Website: www.itpsupport.org.uk

The website provides more help and support for children with ITP and their families.

Important

This patient information provides general guidance only.

If you have any concerns about your child, please contact your healthcare team for advice.

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