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By Chris Tighe at 10:22 am, Dec 10, 2018
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Thrombocytopenia (low platelet count)

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Thrombocytopenia is a condition in which you have a low blood platelet count. Platelets (thrombocytes) are colorless blood cells that help blood clot. Platelets stop bleeding by clumping and forming plugs in blood vessel injuries.

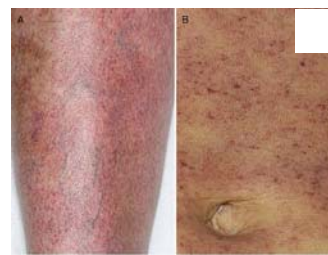
Thrombocytopenia often occurs as a result of a separate disorder, such as leukemia or an immune system problem. Or it can be a side effect of taking certain medications. It affects both children and adults.

Thrombocytopenia may be mild and cause few signs or symptoms. In rare cases, the number of platelets may be so low that dangerous internal bleeding occurs. Treatment options are available.

Symptoms

Thrombocytopenia signs and symptoms may include:

- Easy or excessive bruising (purpura)
- Superficial bleeding into the skin that appears as a rash of pinpoint-sized reddish-purple spots (petechiae), usually on the lower legs
- Prolonged bleeding from cuts
- Bleeding from your gums or nose



Petechiae

Petechiae may look like a rash and usually appear in clusters. Here they appear on a leg (A) and on an abdomen (B).



Prescribing Information, including **Boxed WARNING**, and Medication Guide

Indications

PROMACTA is a prescription medicine used to treat adults and children 1 year and older with low blood platelet counts due to chronic liver disease.

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- Blood in urine or stools
- Unusually heavy menstrual flows
- Fatigue
- Enlarged spleen
- Jaundice

When to see a doctor

Make an appointment with your doctor if you have any warning signs that worry you.

Bleeding that won't stop is a medical emergency. Seek immediate help if you experience bleeding that can't be controlled by the usual first-aid techniques, such as applying pressure to the area.

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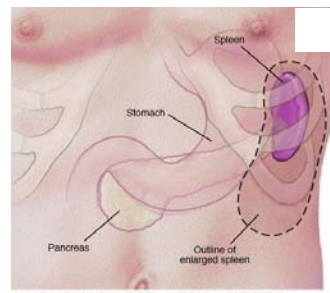
Causes

If for any reason your blood platelet count falls below normal, the condition is called thrombocytopenia. Normally, you have anywhere from 150,000 to 450,000 platelets per microliter of circulating blood. Because each platelet lives only about 10 days, your body continually renews your platelet supply by producing new platelets in your bone marrow.

Thrombocytopenia can be inherited or it may be caused by a number of medications or conditions. Whatever the cause, circulating platelets are reduced by one or more of the following processes: trapping of platelets in the spleen, decreased platelet production or increased destruction of platelets.

Trapped platelets

The spleen is a small organ about the size of your fist located just below your rib cage on the left side of your abdomen. Normally, your spleen works to fight infection and filter unwanted material from your blood. An enlarged spleen — which can be caused by a number of disorders — may harbor too



Enlarged spleen

The spleen is a small organ normally about the size of your fist. A number of conditions, including liver disease and some cancers, can cause your spleen to become enlarged.

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many platelets, causing a decrease in the number of platelets in circulation.

Decreased production of platelets

Platelets are produced in your bone marrow. If production is low, you may develop thrombocytopenia. Factors that can decrease platelet production include:

- Leukemia
- Some types of anemia
- Viral infections, such as hepatitis C or HIV
- Chemotherapy drugs
- Heavy alcohol consumption

Increased breakdown of platelets

Some conditions can cause your body to use up or destroy platelets more rapidly than they're produced. This leads to a shortage of platelets in your bloodstream. Examples of such conditions include:

- **Pregnancy.** Thrombocytopenia caused by pregnancy is usually mild and improves soon after childbirth.
- **Immune thrombocytopenia.** This type is caused by autoimmune diseases, such as lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. The body's immune system mistakenly attacks and destroys platelets. If the exact cause of this condition isn't known, it's called idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura. This type more often affects children.
- **Bacteria in the blood.** Severe bacterial infections involving the blood (bacteremia) may lead to destruction of platelets.
- **Thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura.** This is a rare condition that occurs when small blood clots suddenly form throughout your body, using up large numbers of platelets.
- **Hemolytic uremic syndrome.** This rare disorder causes a sharp drop in platelets, destruction of red blood cells and impairment of kidney function. Sometimes it can occur in association with a bacterial *Escherichia coli* (E. coli) infection, such as may be acquired from eating raw or undercooked meat.
- **Medications.** Certain medications can reduce the number of platelets in your blood. Sometimes a drug confuses the immune system and causes it to destroy platelets. Examples include heparin, quinine, sulfa-containing antibiotics and anticonvulsants.

Complications

Dangerous internal bleeding can occur when your platelet count falls below 10,000 platelets per microliter. Though rare, severe thrombocytopenia can cause bleeding into the brain, which can be fatal.

By Mayo Clinic Staff

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