

What Are Platelet Disorders?

Platelets are tiny blood cells that are made in the bone marrow from larger cells. When you are injured, platelets form a plug, called a blood clot, to seal your wound. Blood clots help stop or slow down bleeding. Platelet disorders are conditions that occur when the platelet count in your blood is too high or too low or your platelets do not work properly.

Types

There are many types of platelet disorders.



A higher-than-normal platelet count is called [thrombocytosis or thrombocythemia](#). Having too many platelets can cause blood clots to form in your blood vessels. This can block blood flow through your body.



A lower-than-normal platelet count is called [thrombocytopenia](#). Some types of thrombocytopenia are immune thrombocytopenia and [thrombotic thrombocytopenic purpura](#). When you have a low platelet count, your blood does not clot normally. You may have trouble stopping bleeding.



National Heart, Lung,
and Blood Institute

**Blood Diseases
& Disorders
Education Program**



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Causes and Risk Factors

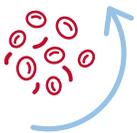
Platelet disorders are caused by factors that affect how your body makes platelets. They can happen when:

- Your body makes too many platelets.
- Your body makes too few platelets.
- Your platelets are used up or destroyed faster than they can be replaced.
- You have enough platelets, but they aren't working properly.

Some people are born with a platelet disorder, while others develop it later in life. You may have an increased risk for a platelet disorder because of your age, family history and genetics, lifestyle habits, medicines you take, other medical conditions, race and ethnicity, or sex (many platelet disorders are more common in women).

Symptoms

If your platelet count is not very high or very low, you may not have any symptoms. People often see their healthcare providers when they start to have bruises for no reason or have heavy bleeding after a small injury.



Symptoms of a high platelet count are mostly caused by a blood clot and may include:

- Chest pain and heart palpitations; difficulty breathing
- Dizziness, changes in your vision, weakness, numbness, slurred speech, or transient ischemic attacks (strokes that last only a few minutes)
- Extreme tiredness
- Headaches
- Pain and swelling of legs
- Spleen or liver that is larger than normal

Bleeding can happen when you have a high platelet count, but your platelets do not work normally. It can also happen when blood clots use up all your platelets. You may have nosebleeds, bleeding from your gums, and blood in your urine or stool. Blood in your stool may make your stool appear black.

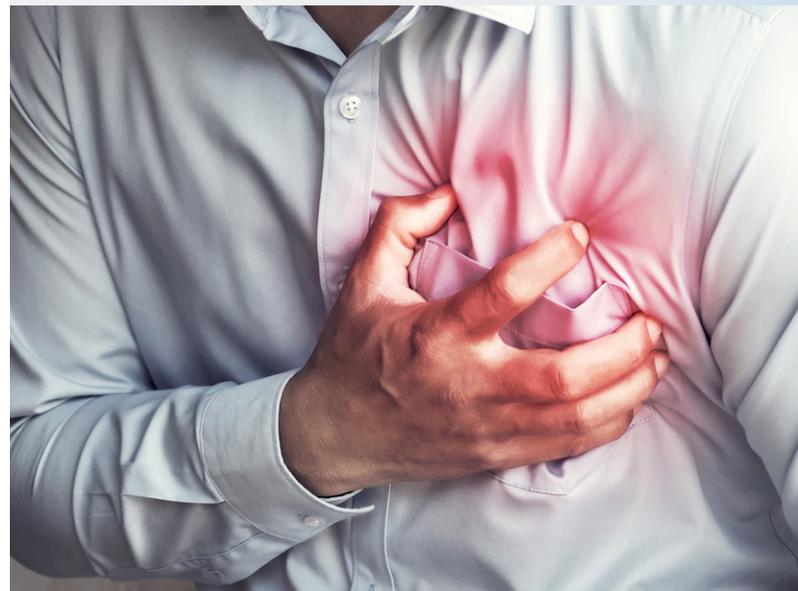


Symptoms of a low platelet count or platelets that do not work properly include:

- Bleeding from your gums, nosebleeds, or bleeding for a long time after a small injury
- Blood in your stool, urine, or vomit, or black stool or vomit that looks like coffee grounds
- Bruising easily
- Extreme tiredness
- Heavy menstrual periods
- Petechiae, which are small, flat red spots under the skin caused by blood leaking from blood vessels
- Purpura, which is bleeding in your skin that can cause red, purple, or brownish-yellow spots
- Spleen or liver that is larger than normal
- Weakness and confusion

Platelet disorders can cause serious bleeding, menstrual bleeding lasting more than 7 days, bone marrow failure, heart attack or decreased blood flow to your heart, pregnancy complications, and other health problems.

If you think that you are or someone else is having symptoms of serious bleeding, a heart attack, or stroke, **call 9-1-1** immediately. **Every minute matters.**





Diagnosis

Healthcare providers do not often screen for platelet disorders unless you have risk factors. If so, your provider may call for a routine blood test to check for high or low platelet counts.



Your provider will diagnose a platelet disorder based on your physical exam and results from blood tests. They may order more tests to see whether another medical condition is causing your platelet disorder. You may have to see a hematologist, a doctor who specializes in treating blood disorders.

Treatment

You may not need treatment if your platelet count reaches or stays in a healthy range. Some platelet disorders can get better on their own.

If you need treatment, your treatment plan will depend on the type of platelet disorder you have and your symptoms. If a medicine is causing your platelet disorder, your healthcare provider will ask you to stop taking that medicine. You will also need to treat the medical condition that is causing your platelet disorder. There are also medicines and procedures that can help treat platelet disorders.

Living With a Platelet Disorder

If you are diagnosed with a platelet disorder, it is important to follow your treatment plan. Your healthcare provider may ask you to take the following steps to help prevent complications:

- Get routine medical care.
- Take all medicines as prescribed.

- Watch for symptoms of bleeding.
- Tell your provider if you have any symptoms of an infection, such as a fever.
- Avoid medicines, such as aspirin or ibuprofen, that may thin your blood too much and lower your platelet count or stop your platelets from working properly.
- Make healthy lifestyle changes. If you smoke, quit. Smoking can raise your risk of getting a blood clot.
- Avoid injuries that can cause bruising and bleeding.

Pregnancy and Platelet Disorders

Pregnancy can cause your platelet count to be slightly lower than normal. This is called gestational thrombocytopenia. It is common and usually does not cause problems for the mother or baby. However, certain serious conditions, such as [HELLP syndrome](#) and preeclampsia (high blood pressure that occurs during pregnancy), can cause very low platelet counts.

If you already have a platelet disorder, pregnancy may make your condition worse. Your healthcare team will monitor your platelet count and other symptoms during and soon after your pregnancy. A very high platelet count can cause blood clots that can block blood flow to your baby. Very low platelet counts can cause bleeding. It's important to get routine medical care during pregnancy to help you avoid or manage complications.

If you have a high platelet count, taking some types of birth control pills can raise your risk of blood clots. Talk to your provider about a birth control method that is safe for you.



Learn more about platelet disorders at nhlbi.nih.gov/health/platelet-disorders