



NEBRASKA CANCER SPECIALISTS

the Physicians of Oncology Hematology West

Managing Low Platelet Count

Platelets are bone marrow cells that are found in the circulating blood and are critical in stopping bleeding. Platelets, along with other blood components, rush to the site of an injury and work to form a blood clot, which is necessary to stop the bleeding. A low platelet count is referred to as thrombocytopenia. Thrombocytopenia is a common side effect of chemotherapy.

Causes of a low platelet count—Thrombocytopenia

Normally, there are billions of platelets in the blood; however, certain chemotherapy drugs can cause the number of platelets to decrease. Chemotherapy works by destroying cells that grow rapidly, such as cells in the bone marrow that generate platelets.

A low platelet count typically occurs 6 to 10 days following administration of chemotherapy and continues for several days before the number of platelets in the blood increases to an adequate level. Infrequently, you may also experience thrombocytopenia from other medications or as a consequence of your cancer.

Monitoring your platelet count

A low platelet count puts you at risk of certain side effects. Bleeding is the most important:

- If you do not have enough platelets to form a clot, your body will not be able to stop bleeding.
- Even a small cut can cause you to lose a dangerous amount of blood.
- The fewer platelets you have in your blood, the more susceptible you are to experience bleeding.

In some cases of a low platelet count your treatment may have to be delayed or the dose reduced until the platelet count has increased.

If you have a severely low platelet count, you may require a transfusion of platelets. A platelet transfusion is the addition of platelets into your blood from another person who has donated their blood. Any transfusion carries the small risk of complications, which include infection and allergic reactions that may range from mild to life-threatening. Ask your doctor to explain the risks and benefits of platelet transfusions and the various options for treating low platelet counts.

Lowering your risk of bleeding

If your platelet count is low, you should try to avoid situations that may cause injury or bleeding.

- Do only mild, low-impact activity for exercise, such as walking or swimming.
- Shave with an electric razor instead of a blade.
- Use a soft-bristle toothbrush.
- Be careful not to bump into things which can cause bruising or bleeding under the skin.

For more information feel free to visit the website chemocare.com