Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP)

What is ITP?

Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP) is a bleeding disorder. In ITP, your body’s immune system attacks and destroys platelets in your blood. Platelets are made in your bone marrow and help your blood to clot. Thrombocytopenia happens when there are a low number of platelets in your blood. If your platelets are low, you are at risk to bruise or bleed more easily. Bleeding can happen because of an injury, a surgery, a procedure or suddenly for no reason.

What are the symptoms of ITP?

Symptoms of this disorder may include:

- Bruise more easily
- Nosebleeds
- Bleeding from your gums or mouth
- Tiny pinpoint red or purple dots (petechiae) on your skin that looks like a rash
- Purple spots or bruises on your skin (purpura)
- Menstrual bleeding or a period that is much heavier or lasts much longer than normal
- Bleeding in your gastrointestinal tract

How is ITP diagnosed?

Your doctor will talk with you about your symptoms, take a medical history and do a physical exam. The doctor will also order a series of blood tests, called an “initial workup,” to check your blood cells.
How is ITP treated?

Treatment for ITP depends on your symptoms, platelet count and risk for bleeding. Your doctor will talk with you about what treatment is best for you and when treatment should start.

Treatments may include:

- Steroid medicine
- IV (intravenous) medicine called Immunoglobulin
- Other medicines that suppress your immune system
- Platelet transfusions
- Splenectomy (removal of the spleen)

Other Information

- For more information on how to help protect yourself when you have a low platelet count, see the patient education handout, Preventing Bleeding When You Have a Low Platelet Count.
- To learn more about ITP, visit the Platelet Disorder Support Association’s website www.pdsa.org.