Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP)

What is ITP?

Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura (ITP) is a bleeding disorder. In ITP, the body’s immune system attacks and destroys platelets in the blood. Platelets are made in the 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?

People with ITP may have the following signs and symptoms:

- Bruise more easily
- Nosebleeds
- Bleeding from the gums or mouth
- Tiny pinpoint red or purple dots (petechiae) on the skin that looks like a rash
- Purple spots or bruises on the skin (purpura)

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 lab work to check your blood cells including a test called a complete blood count (CBC).
Blood cells and platelets are made in your bone marrow. The bone marrow is the soft spongy tissue inside your bones. If platelets are low, a bone marrow biopsy (small sample of bone marrow) may also be done to help diagnose ITP. See the patient education handout, Bone Marrow Procedure for more information.

**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.

Some 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.