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Drug-induced thrombocytopenia

Thrombocytopenia is any disorder in which there are not enough platelets. Platelets are elements in the blood that help the blood clot. A low platelet count makes bleeding more likely.

When medicines or drugs cause a low platelet count, it is called drug-induced thrombocytopenia.

Causes

Drug-induced thrombocytopenia occurs when certain medicines destroy platelets or interfere with the body's ability to make enough of them.

There are two types of drug-induced thrombocytopenia: immune and nonimmune.

If a medicine causes your immune system to produce antibodies which seek and destroy your platelets, the condition is called drug-induced immune thrombocytopenia. Heparin, a blood thinner, is the most common cause of drug-induced immune thrombocytopenia.

If a medicine prevents your bone marrow from making enough platelets, the condition is called drug-induced nonimmune thrombocytopenia. Chemotherapy drugs and a seizure medicine called valproic acid may lead to this problem.

Other medicines that cause drug-induced thrombocytopenia include:

- Furosemide
- Gold, used to treat arthritis
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)
- Penicillin
- Quinidine
- Quinine
- Ranitidine
- Sulfonamides
- Linezolid and other antibiotics
- Statins

Symptoms

Decreased platelets may cause:

- Abnormal bleeding
- Bleeding when you brush your teeth
- Easy bruising
- Pinpoint red spots on the skin (petechiae)

Treatment

The first step is to stop using the medicine that is causing the problem.

For people who have life-threatening bleeding, treatments may include:

- Immunoglobulin therapy (IVIG) given through a vein
- Plasma exchange (plasmapheresis)
- Platelet transfusions
- Corticosteroid medicine

Possible Complications

Bleeding can be life threatening if it occurs in the brain or certain other organs.

A pregnant woman who has antibodies to platelets may pass the antibodies to the baby in the womb.

When to Contact a Medical Professional

Contact your health care provider if you have unexplained bleeding or bruising and are taking medicines, such as the ones mentioned above under Causes.

Alternative Names

Drug-induced thrombocytopenia; Immune thrombocytopenia - drug

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