

Monitoring low blood platelet count in pregnancy

Maternity Service

Last reviewed: January 2023

Next review: January 2026

Information for Patients

Leaflet number: 234 Version: 3

What are platelets?

Platelets are small cells in the blood that are important in forming clots and therefore stopping bleeds. The normal range for platelet count is 140,000 to 400,000 per microliter (mcL) of blood (or 140–400 x 10⁹/L). When your platelet count becomes low this is called **thrombocytopenia**.

What are the symptoms of low platelet levels in pregnancy?

Many women have no symptoms but are found to have a low platelet count on routine blood tests in pregnancy.

Some women may bleed or bruise easily, or have small red or purple marks on the skin (purpura or petechiae). Occasionally some women may experience bleeding such as nosebleeds.

Why does a low blood platelet count need to be monitored?

Platelets are important for your blood to be able to clot. A low platelet count can sometimes cause bleeding problems which can be prevented with the right management. Usually bleeding problems do not occur unless platelets fall below 30-50 x 10⁹/L.

It is important to monitor a low platelet count in order to reduce any risks. This is done by having regular blood tests. The results are checked by your midwifery team, and if needed you will be seen in the antenatal haematology clinic.

What causes low platelets in pregnancy?

6% of women have low platelet counts in pregnancy because of natural changes taking place in the body. If this is caused by pregnancy it is called "gestational thrombocytopenia".

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

It is not a cause for concern as platelets rarely fall below $80 \times 10^9/L$, and usually return to normal levels in the weeks after your baby is born.

However, some women develop a non-pregnancy related condition called 'immune thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP)'. This is when the antibodies produced by your immune system attack the body's own tissue instead of fighting infections. This 'autoimmunity' means antibodies can sometimes target the body's own tissue such as the platelets, resulting in a low platelet count. This condition may need steroid therapy and/ or other treatment to maintain a good platelet count. If this becomes necessary, your doctor will discuss the treatment options in detail with you.

Will this affect whether I can have an epidural for pain relief during labour?

Epidural is a method of pain relief which introduces a needle and anaesthetic into the lining of the spine. This may not be possible if your platelet count is below $80 \times 10^9/L$. Other options for pain relief will be discussed with you.

Can it affect my baby?

If your platelet count is only slightly below normal, it shouldn't cause you or your baby any problems.

If you have immune thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP), some antibodies can cross the placenta from mother to baby and attach to the baby's platelets. This can result in low platelets in the baby. This is unusual and rarely causes any bleeding problems in the baby. However steps may be taken to reduce trauma to the baby at birth e.g. avoidance of suction delivery (ventouse). A blood sample from the umbilical cord can be taken at delivery to check the platelet count. Occasionally babies may need a platelet transfusion if their count is very low.

Contact details

Obstetrics (Maternity) Haematology Nurse Specialist - Tel: 07983 057833.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل
જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।
Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk