Thrombocytopenia

What is Thrombocytopenia?
Thrombocytopenia is a bleeding disorder in which the blood contains lower than normal levels of functional platelets. It the most common cause of bleeding in cancer patients. Platelet levels may fall due to insufficient bone marrow production, increased consumption of platelets, or abnormal platelet removal from the blood by the spleen.

What are platelets?
Platelets enable the body to control bleeding at the site of an injury. They are produced in the bone marrow and are removed from the blood by the spleen. These two organs work together to regulate platelet levels in the blood. Platelets are fragile cells and are easily damaged.

What causes Thrombocytopenia?
Platelet production may be suppressed by leukemia, cancer chemotherapy, exposure to radiation used in cancer treatment among other factors not related to cancer. Substances that interfere with platelet production include alcohol, histamine-2 blocking agents, hormones, heparin and sulfa drugs. Additionally, a patient’s own immune system may destroy the platelets in the blood.

What are the signs and symptoms?
The symptoms may be easily noted. On the skin, small purplish-red spots, rashes, and easy bruising may appear. A patient may also notice spontaneous bleeding. The inability to clot may also lead to blood in the stool, urine, vomit or sputum.
**How is thrombocytopenia treated?**
Your doctor may use a platelet growth factor in order to stimulate platelet production. Some patients will have a platelet transfusion. Patients should avoid anti-platelet drugs such as aspirin and Advil.

**Additional resources:**
www.telemedicine.arizona.edu
www.411cancer.com