

# Thrombocytopenia (decreased platelet count)

- Thrombocytopenia is a life-threatening condition leading to uncontrollable bleeding and severe anemia.
- It is a decrease in the number of platelets, which are necessary to form clots.
- Various diseases may lead to thrombocytopenia.
- Immediate medical attention is necessary for survival.
- The success of treatment depends on the primary disease and response to treatment.

### What Is Thrombocytopenia?

*Thrombocytopenia* is the term used when a patient does not have enough platelets in the blood. Platelets (also called thrombocytes) are cell fragments that are necessary for forming blood clots and that help in repairing damaged blood vessels. Platelets are formed in the bone marrow. Their numbers can be low if not enough are being made or if too many are being used or destroyed by the body. Causes of thrombocytopenia include blood loss, immune system disorders, clotting disorders, cancer, and infectious diseases such as Rocky Mountain spotted fever and feline leukemia virus.

Adequate numbers of platelets are essential to survival. Platelets are needed to repair obvious injuries, such as open wounds, as well as microscopic injuries that occur in day-to-day life. If platelet numbers are too low, uncontrolled bleeding can occur, and if treatment is unsuccessful, the patient will die from overwhelming blood loss.

### Signs of Thrombocytopenia

- Small bloody spots seen on the skin or gums
- Bleeding from the nose
- Blood in vomit, stool, or urine
- Excessive bleeding from a wound
- Pale gums
- Lethargy, weakness

### Diagnosis

Thrombocytopenia is diagnosed based on history, clinical signs, physical examination findings, and laboratory tests. A platelet count is included in a complete blood count (CBC), which will allow your veterinarian to determine the severity of the thrombocytopenia. Other tests may be performed to determine what is causing the low platelet numbers. These may include a blood chemistry panel, urinalysis, radiography (x-rays), ultrasound, tests for immune diseases, tests for infectious disease, and taking a bone marrow sample.

### Treatment

Thrombocytopenia needs to be treated as soon as it is recognized. Many of the illnesses that cause thrombocytopenia are not obvious right away. Your veterinarian may choose to start treatment for the most common causes before knowing the exact one. Initial treatments may include blood or plasma transfusions, steroids, and antibiotics. As the diagnosis becomes clear, your veterinarian may customize treatment. Some patients may need to be medicated for months to years until their platelet numbers stabilize. Follow-up care for these patients consists of frequent physical examinations and platelet counts. Medications may be slowly discontinued after platelet numbers have been in the normal range for some time; however, relapses occur in about 50% of cases. Some pets don't respond to treatment.

### Prevention

There is no known way to prevent thrombocytopenia. However, the use of the feline leukemia vaccine and a solid tick prevention strategy may help in the prevention of infectious diseases that cause thrombocytopenia. It may be possible to minimize relapses by avoiding the original cause.