

Low platelet levels (thrombocytopaenia)

say **throm-bow-site-oh-pee-nya**

Quick summary:

- Liver cirrhosis can cause low platelet levels which makes it harder for your blood to clot.
- If platelet levels are very low (under 50,000 per microlitre of blood) it increases the risk of bleeding if you have any type of surgery.
- There are 2 main treatments to increase platelet levels before surgery – platelet transfusion or medicines.
- Always tell your doctor or dentist if you have a low platelet count.

Platelets are small, gold-coloured blood cells that help to control bleeding. If you have a wound or bruise the platelets in your blood clump together and form a clot. The clot plugs the wound and stops the bleeding.

People with liver cirrhosis often have low platelet levels. If you have fewer than 150,000 platelets in every microlitre of blood it is medically known as thrombocytopaenia. Your platelet levels will be monitored by your clinical team and they will tell you if you have a low platelet count.

Most of the time this won't cause any problems, but it can increase the risk of a serious bleed if you are having surgery. It is very important that you tell all medical and dental professionals if you have a low platelet count. If you need to have surgery of any kind, including dental surgery, you might need to have treatment to increase your platelet count. This makes surgery safer for you by helping prevent serious bleeding.

Treatments to raise platelet levels before surgery

If you are having surgery and your platelet level is below 50,000 per microlitre of blood you will be given treatment to increase it. There are 2 main treatments, a platelet transfusion or a short course of medicine. Most people will be offered a platelet transfusion. The medicines take several days to have an effect so they can only be used for planned (elective) surgery. **If you are having surgery and would be interested in having medicines to raise your platelet level instead of a transfusion, ask your doctor or dentist if it's suitable for you.**

Platelet transfusion

A transfusion is when you are given blood cells such as platelets from another person (donor). This increases your platelet levels straight away, but it does not last for very long. So you need to have the transfusion soon before your surgery.

Having a platelet transfusion

You will be given platelets that are safe for people with your blood group. People usually have 1 bag of platelets. The transfusion can take up to 4 hours, but it is often quicker. You sit in a chair or lie down on a bed.

1. A needle is inserted into a vein in your arm or hand.
2. The needle is connected to the bag of platelets with a tube.
3. The platelets run through the tube and into your vein.

You might feel a sharp prick or scratch when the needle is put into your vein. Some people get a temperature, chills or a rash during the transfusion. These are usually treated with paracetamol or by slowing down the transfusion. A member of hospital staff will check on you regularly. Tell them if you feel ill or uncomfortable.

For planned surgery you will usually have the transfusion the night before your surgery and stay overnight in hospital. If you need emergency surgery, the transfusion will be done as soon as possible.

Medicines to increase platelet levels

There are 2 medicines available, you might be prescribed either of them. They work by increasing the amount of platelets your body produces. This gives your levels a short-term boost. It takes several days for the medicines to get your platelet levels high enough for surgery. So this option is only available for planned (elective) surgery.

The medicines can be prescribed by your GP, you don't need to visit a hospital.

How we can help: Find out more about the support we offer at liveruk.org/support or call our nurse-led helpline: **0800 652 7330**

