

# A Guide for Parents

A Resource for Childhood ITP

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Your child has been diagnosed with immune or idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP). The following information about the disease, including its possible causes, treatment, and outcome, will hopefully prove useful to you.

## Definition of ITP.

**Immune or idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura** (ITP) is a condition characterized by bleeding resulting from a low platelet count due to increased destruction of platelets by the body. "Immune" refers to the body's system of reacting against germs and other foreign substances in the body. "Idiopathic" is a medical term indicating that we do not know the cause of the illness. "Thrombocytopenic" is a medical term meaning a low platelet count. "Purpura" means bruising. Therefore, ITP is an illness of unknown cause, but involving the body's immune system, characterized by bruising and other bleeding resulting from a low platelet count. There are two forms of ITP, acute ITP (in which the disease lasts for less than six months) and chronic ITP (where the condition lasts for more than six months and often for many years). The distinction between acute and chronic ITP is arbitrary and has to do only with the time the platelet count has been low.

**What are platelets?** Platelets are small, sticky particles in the blood which are necessary for blood clotting. A reduction in the number of platelets results in bleeding in the skin, from body openings (nose, mouth, vagina, rectum) and sometimes internally. Platelets are produced (along with the red blood cells and white blood cells) in the bone marrow, the spongy tissue inside the bones.

**Why are the platelets low in ITP?** A reduction in any part of the blood count (including the platelets) can be due either to decreased production in the bone marrow or increased destruction by the body. In ITP the platelet count is low primarily as a result of increased destruction of the platelets. An antibody against the platelets is produced, sometimes as a result of a recent viral infection. The antibody attaches to the platelets and leads to their rapid removal from the bloodstream. In a sense, a child with ITP is "allergic" to his or her own platelets as a result of abnormally increased immunity. That is why doctors call the disease Immune Thrombocytopenic Purpura. Even though the bone marrow (which is normal in ITP) may produce platelets at an increased rate, it is unable to "keep up" with those that are destroyed, and the platelet count drops to a level that may result in bleeding. The place in the body where most of the platelets are destroyed is the spleen, an organ under the left rib cage which filters and cleanses the blood.

**What is the Cause of my Child's ITP?** Many parents are alarmed and frustrated by their child's ITP because of uncertainty about its cause. They tend to blame themselves for having done something wrong or having overlooked something about their child. Such guilt is common in diseases whose causes are unclear. ITP is not alone among conditions where the cause is unknown. After all, we also don't know the cause of many other diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, kidney problems, asthma, and skin conditions. The best evidence at present is that there is some type of imbalance in the child's immunity that leads to the production of the antibody or other immune reaction against the platelet. This imbalance is either due to a previous viral infection or, in the case of chronic ITP, to a subtle underlying autoimmune disorder.

**So, you couldn't have prevented your child's ITP and are not at fault. Don't blame yourself! Clearly more research is needed regarding the cause of ITP.**

(The above was found online at [www.childhood-itp.net/ITP/Parents\\_Guide\\_2.html](http://www.childhood-itp.net/ITP/Parents_Guide_2.html))