

What is ITP?

Idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura or Immune Thrombocytopenia is a disorder that can lead to easy or excessive bruising and bleeding. The bleeding results from unusually low levels of platelets — the cells that help your blood clot.

Idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura, which is also called immune thrombocytopenic purpura, affects both children and adults. Children often develop idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura after a viral infection and usually recover fully without treatment. In adults, however, the disorder is often chronic.

Treatment of idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura depends on your symptoms, your platelet count and your age. If you don't have signs of bleeding and your platelet count isn't too low, treatment for idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura usually isn't necessary. More serious cases may be treated with medications or, in critical situations, with surgery.

Types of ITP

The two types of ITP are acute (temporary or short-term) and chronic (long-lasting).

Acute ITP generally lasts less than 6 months. It mainly occurs in children—both boys and girls—and is the most common type of ITP. Acute ITP often occurs after a viral infection.

Chronic ITP lasts 6 months or longer and mostly affects adults. However, some teenagers and children do get this type of ITP. Chronic ITP affects women two to three times more often than men.

About 4.3 to 5.3 per 100,000 children are diagnosed with ITP each year. Since children with ITP usually recover, the number of children who have ITP at any one time is about equal to those diagnosed annually. Adults are approximately 9.5 cases per 100,000.

Outlook

For most children and adults, ITP isn't a serious or life-threatening condition.

Acute ITP in children often goes away on its own within a few weeks or months and doesn't return. In 80 percent of children who have ITP, the platelet count returns to normal within 6 to 12 months. Treatment may not be needed.

For a small number of children, ITP doesn't go away on its own and may require further medical or surgical treatment.

Chronic ITP varies from person to person and can last for many years. Even people who have severe forms of chronic ITP can live for decades.

ITP can't be passed from one person to another.