



## No. 18 – ITP, Sports, & Sports

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Title: **ITP, Sports, and Sports Injuries**

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EVERYONE SHOULD ENGAGE in physical activity to help prevent obesity and enhance physical and mental health, including persons with ITP. Beyond the activities of daily life are sports which, for many, are an enjoyable hobby, but not a passion. Others, however, may strive to excel as an important part of their life, risking injury which, as those with ITP know, can precipitate bleeding. Readers might also wish to consult, *An American Perspective*, Sept. 2000, 'Activity Restrictions in Children with ITP' where we dealt with some of these issues as they pertain to children.

So before any type of athletic sport, one must weigh the benefits – the good feeling and accomplishment which arises from physical activity against the risk of injury and bleeding. It has been asked whether cardiovascular exercise – aerobic conditioning (fast walking, jogging, swimming) or muscle strengthening – causes bleeding. Generally, the answer is no. Vigorous exercise may lead to “huffing & puffing” resulting in more petechiae than usual on the face and neck, but unless one has severe ITP with regular bleeding, nosebleeds or internal hemorrhage would not be expected with exercises to improve cardiovascular performance or muscle strength.

The situation is different for more active sports (football, tennis, basketball, running, baseball, cricket, etc.). We discourage participation in contact sports where bumps to the head are “guaranteed”, such as football and boxing. However, other athletic activities for ITP persons can be condoned, even encouraged, as long as they are supervised (for children) using common sense precautions (such as wearing a helmet when bicycling). Unless the person with ITP has severe bleeding manifestations, minor bumps and scrapes associated with many sports should not cause more than a few additional bruises and petechiae. As stated in our Sept. 2000 essay, physicians unfamiliar with ITP can overestimate the risk of bleeding, recommending restrictions to those with ITP. A significant sports injury can cause bleeding even in a person without ITP!

Now, a comment on drugs taken for pain relief from injuries. Most are best treated with rest, immobilization, an ice bag on the painful area and elevation of the extremity. However, if pain medication is needed paracetamol is recommended. Ibuprofen, or other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory, is not a good idea, especially if the platelet count is below 20. Such drugs can slightly damage the function of the platelets. Aspirin is taboo for people with ITP. If the injury is more severe a physician should be consulted and stronger pain relief may be required. Those with a very low platelet count may also require treatment to raise the count.

Finally, are there special precautions for persons on steroids? Those on chronic high-dose steroid therapy (which should be rarely, if ever, prescribed for persons with ITP) may have osteoporosis or brittle bones. This may predispose them to fractures, but on the other hand is best treated or prevented by regular exercise. The bottom line is that ITP cannot be used as an excuse to be a “couch potato”. It is better to get some exercise and take part in some sports, risking a bruise or two, than avoid physical activity and face the long-term risks of diabetes, heart attack, and other conditions that are far worse than ITP, but are related to obesity.