



No. 45 – How often does ITP

American Perspective reprinted from: **Mar 2013**

Title: **How often does ITP occur?**

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As everyone with ITP knows, ITP is not a familiar disorder. When a person is diagnosed with ITP, typically no one in their family or among their friends has ever heard of it before. Even the family doctor may be unfamiliar with ITP. Receiving a diagnosis of a “blood disease” that you have never heard of can be frightening. Helping patients and their families to become familiar with ITP is the major goal of the ITP Support Association. Simply creating awareness of ITP provides comfort. The patient stories in each issue of *The Platelet* are comforting because they put faces on ITP. The ITP Support Association’s annual Conventions are important because patients and their families can meet others and gain greater comfort that they are not alone, that others have overcome the problems that they are now facing.

But why is ITP unfamiliar? One reason, of course, is that ITP is not common. How often does ITP occur? To understand this, you first have to understand the two ways to describe the frequency of a disorder. “Incidence” describes how often a disorder is first diagnosed, such as the number of patients with a new diagnosis of ITP per 100,000 people per year. “Prevalence”, describes the total number of people living with a disorder, such as the total number of patients with ITP per 100,000 – at any single point in time, or over a period of time. Dr. Dee Terrell, my faculty colleague at the University of Oklahoma, has had a career interest in ITP (some of you met her at the 2007 Convention in Oxford). She has analyzed all of the published reports on the incidence of ITP in children and adults and then her Ph.D. dissertation project was to determine the prevalence of ITP in children and adults in the state of Oklahoma. Here are the data for how often ITP occurs.

Annual incidence and prevalence of ITP, diabetes, acute leukemia in children, and breast cancer

Disorder	Incidence		Prevalence	
	Children	Adults	Children	Adults
ITP	4.2	3.3	8.1	12.1
Diabetes			8600	
Leukemia	2.8			
Breast Cancer		90		

The incidence and prevalence numbers are “per 100,000 children or adults per year”, and for breast cancer, “per 100,000 adult women per year”. The prevalence of diabetes is “per 100,000 children and adults”.

You can see that the prevalence of ITP is greater than the incidence, as expected. Even though most children recover from ITP within a year, the prevalence is greater than the incidence because some children have chronic ITP and some children who have recovered from ITP may still be seen occasionally by their

hematologist. For adults, the prevalence is about 4-times the incidence, because many adults have persistent ITP.

The table also shows the incidence and prevalence of some disorders that are more familiar than ITP. Everyone knows about diabetes because diabetes (in both children and adults) typically lasts for a lifetime and therefore is 400-times more common than ITP. Everyone knows about leukemia, particularly acute leukemia in children, even though the incidence of acute leukemia in children is about the same as the incidence of ITP in children, because acute leukemia is life-threatening. Everyone knows about breast cancer, because it is both much more common than ITP and it is also life-threatening.

To make these numbers more familiar, the next table tells the expected incidence and prevalence for the city we live in, Oklahoma City, which has a population of about 100,000 children and 400,000 adults, which is similar to the population of Manchester, England.

Expected annual of incidence and prevalence of ITP, diabetes, acute leukemia in children, and breast cancer in Oklahoma City

Disorder	Children	Adults
Incidence (new diagnoses per year)		
ITP	4	12
Leukemia	3	
Breast Cancer		360
Prevalence (total patients during a year, children and adults)		
ITP	56	
Diabetes	34,400	

Although we want ITP to become more familiar to more people, including doctors, we must be thankful that ITP is not as common as diabetes and not as life-threatening as leukemia and breast cancer.