

Pain remedies

For sports injuries do not take aspirin or ibuprofen based products as these make platelets less effective. Paracetamol is safe to take. Children can be given Calpol but not Calprofen, which contains ibuprofen.

Padding

If you do choose a sport where you may get bruised you may wish to consider Paintball protective clothing. Because balls of paint are propelled at great force in this activity, bruising is commonplace, and so the clothes worn have evolved to limit bruises from impact. A regular paintball jersey has padded shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists and collar bones and a bounce vest is really thickly padded and can be worn under regular or sports clothes. There are also paintball pants that have thick padding down the front of the legs, but can be vented at the back to stop you overheating. They all come in numerous colour combinations and depending on the brand have different amounts of padding, in various places. Any child/teen wishing to play hockey, for example, should have little trouble finding a set in the school colours. Also worth considering would be: bounce shorts, arm pads (which unlike most sports pads cover from the wrist all the way up to the top of the biceps), and gloves. This clothing can be picked up through paintball shops all over the country as well as websites such as eBay and Amazon.

Children and school sport

In school where there is no option to the timetabled sporting activity parents are advised make an appointment with the head sports teacher to explain about the child's ITP and risks from certain sports. The teacher may be able to offer an alternative such as being a linesman or referee, but the child should not be left shivering on the sidelines watching the other children enjoy their game! Any sport the child participates in should be supervised.

Staff should also be aware that the pupil may be reluctant to expose their bruises when wearing sports or swimming kit, and girls may be very concerned about flooding during their periods.

The ITP Support Association's Guidelines for Schools and Clubs leaflet can be given to schools or sports centres to explain about ITP.

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CHOOSING YOUR SPORT

Which sports are safe to do with ITP?

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We are all being encouraged to take up exercise to keep us fit and prevent obesity, but people with ITP often ask “is sport safe for me?” With a chronic disease many people feel more in control if they look after their body by keeping as fit as possible and eating a healthy diet. Physical activity is good for the body; it can also stimulate the mind, be fun, and help you meet new friends. For anyone taking occasional steroids exercise is recommended to help prevent bones from becoming brittle.

Is there a risk?

For people with ITP the activity should suit your particular condition. The risks and benefits of a certain sport will depend on the level and stability of your platelet count, and the severity of your symptoms.

The greatest risk to someone with ITP when the platelet count is low is serious injury to the head or internal injury, and for this reason contact sports or activities where one might fall from a height are definitely not advisable.

People with a platelet count over 50 who are symptom free and have no other bleeding risks, should be able to participate in most other sports whereas those with a platelet count under 20 and active bleeding symptoms should choose sports where they are unlikely to be hit or fall. Whatever your platelet count, always wear any appropriate protective equipment recommended for the sport.

Choosing a sport

If in doubt, ask your consultant what he considers to be best for you. It may be sensible to choose a different sport rather than have treatment (with all the associated side effects) to raise your count enough to participate in a more risky sport that you enjoyed before developing ITP.

Adults can make this decision for themselves. With children this can be very difficult, and it is not unusual for the child to feel resentful of restrictions or parents being sick with worry because they allow an otherwise unhappy child to continue with a risky sport.

Activities fall into 4 main categories:

1. Low risk of falling or getting hit

eg. swimming, archery, golf, cycling, walking, running, salsa dancing, athletics, tennis, non-contact martial arts, bowling, weightlifting, sailing, Wii-fit.

2. Risk of getting hit, kicked, or bruised

eg. football, hockey, netball, cricket

3. Risk of falling

eg. ice skating, roller blading, gymnastics, cycle racing, jumping events in athletics, rock climbing

4. High risk

eg. all contact sports including combat martial arts, rugby, boxing, wrestling

The list is not comprehensive and each sport should be considered individually as to the possible risks and the level to which the activity will be pursued. For example, moderate weight lifting is acceptable but competitive weight lifting causes excessive build-up of internal pressure and can lead to both muscular and internal bleeding.

Minor injuries

Unlike people with haemophilia, ITP sufferers are not prone to bleeds into muscles or joints, but energetic or straining exercise may cause an increase of petechiae – a rash of pin-prick red spots on the skin caused by tiny drops of blood escaping from the capillaries. (Petechiae can also be caused by pressure from a heavy sports bag!)

Cuts and scrapes don't usually cause a problem in people with ITP, just put gentle pressure on the wound to help your (few) platelets provide a plug while the rest of the blood's clotting factors do their work. More serious gashes or bruises on arms or legs should be held high to slow the blood flow and pressure applied (with medical help sought if necessary).

Bruises are commonly acquired in sport, but they may be much larger and more painful with ITP. Cover bruises and sprains with an icepack as soon as possible to help reduce swelling.

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