

WHAT IS THROMBOCYTOPENIA?

The term thrombocytopenia refers to a condition where a patient has lower than normal levels of circulating platelets. Platelets are cells within the blood that play a critical role in normal blood clotting functions. They are produced in the bone marrow and are released into the circulation.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF ITP?

Immune mediated platelet destruction can be due to a variety of underlying problems that trigger an abnormal immune response. Things such as infections (bacterial or viral), drugs, and cancer have all been implicated as potential causes of ITP. The most common cause of life-threatening thrombocytopenia in dogs is immune-mediated with no identifiable underlying cause.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ITP?

The most common signs you may notice at home are bruising, blood in the stool or urine, or nose bleeds. In some instances, thrombocytopenia may lead to bleeding into the abdomen, chest, brain or spinal cord. In these cases, clinical signs may include labored breathing, abdominal distension or neurologic signs.

HOW IS ITP DIAGNOSED?

Routine blood tests will show low platelet levels; however, the key is determining a cause for the low platelets. Your veterinarian may look for diseases that might result in thrombocytopenia.

HOW IS ITP TREATED?

The mainstay of therapy, aside from treating the underlying cause, is immunosuppressive therapy. Multiple medications may be needed. If the thrombocytopenia is severe, your veterinarian may recommend hospitalizing your pet for observation and more aggressive treatment.

WHAT IS THE PROGNOSIS OF ITP?

The prognosis with ITP can be quite variable and depends on the underlying cause, response to therapy, or drug complications. Overall, if there is no severe underlying disease and your pet responds well to therapy, the prognosis is generally good although lifelong medication may be required. Most dogs respond well to treatment, but relapses are common.