

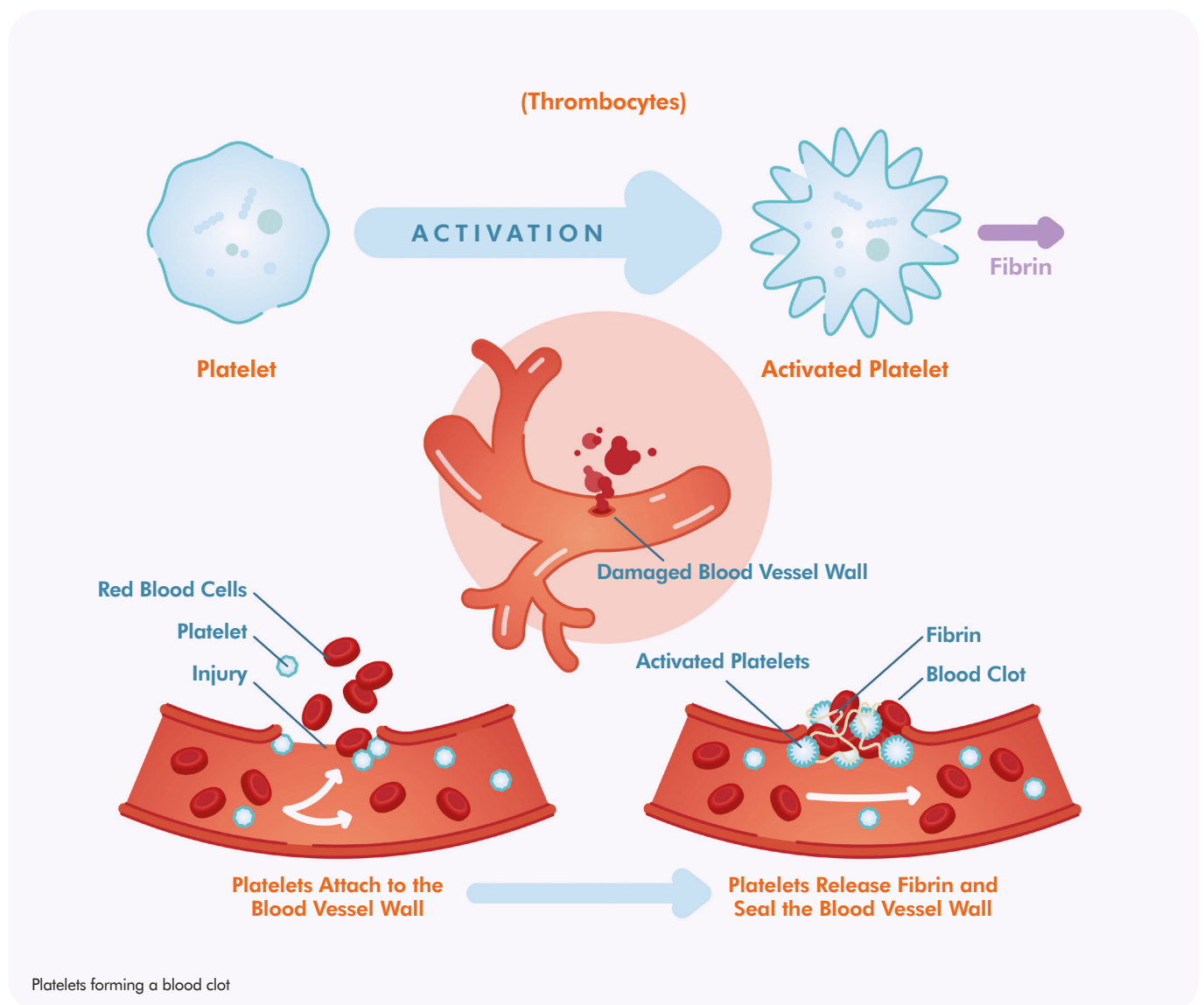


PATHOLOGY TESTS EXPLAINED

Information about pathology tests to help everyone take control of their health and make the right decisions about their care.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT YOUR PLATELET COUNT

A platelet count measures the number of platelets in your blood. It is usually performed as part of a Full Blood Count (FBC), which is a routine test used to assess your general health and check for disorders that can affect your blood cells.



Platelets are the first blood components to be activated when there has been an injury to a blood vessel. When a blood vessel becomes damaged it sends out a signal and platelets respond by travelling to the area where the injury has occurred. They change their shape, become very sticky, and start forming a blood clot to stop bleeding and help wounds to heal.

Platelets are made in the bone marrow and released into the blood where they have a lifespan of about 8 to 10 days. Because of the many small injuries that occur as part of normal life, platelets are constantly being used up and the bone marrow must continually produce new platelets to replace those that are lost.



What can your results tell you?

Your normal platelet count will be about $150-400 \times 10^9$ platelets per litre of blood. If your level falls below $20 \times 10^9/L$, it is likely that spontaneous bleeding will occur.

Too few platelets – thrombocytopenia

Low platelet levels can increase your risk of bleeding. Symptoms can appear suddenly or over time. Symptoms include bruising, bleeding that lasts longer than it should, nosebleeds or bleeding from your gums, bleeding in your skin that causes reddish or brownish patches, or blood in your urine or stool.

This can be due to a range of conditions including bone marrow diseases due to leukaemia or another cancer, autoimmune disorders such as lupus, chronic bleeding, viruses, chemotherapy and radiotherapy, inherited conditions, taking certain medications, kidney disease or drinking too much alcohol.

Too many platelets – thrombocytosis

Having too many platelets can increase your risk of clotting or sometimes even cause bleeding if the platelets aren't functioning properly.

High platelet counts are usually the result of an existing condition such as an inflammatory condition, infectious disease, cancer, or myeloproliferative disorder.

Normal platelet count with symptoms

Sometimes you can have a normal platelet count and your condition is due to other platelet factors.

An example is von Willebrand's disease which is a relatively common inherited condition that results in easy bruising and bleeding. It is due to impaired stickiness of the platelets. You may need to have further platelet function tests to find the cause of your condition.

Temporary changes in platelet levels

A person's platelet levels usually decline with age. Women can have low platelet levels before menstruation, while high levels may occur after childbirth.



What are reference intervals (reference ranges)?

Your results are shown in your report as a comparison against a set of numbers called reference intervals or reference ranges. This is the range of test results considered 'normal' for the general population.

If a result in your report is outside this range it can be flagged as high (H) or low (L). This does not necessarily mean that anything is wrong. It depends on your personal situation. Your results need to be interpreted by your doctor.



Questions to ask your doctor

- Why does this test need to be done?
- Do I need to prepare (such as fast or avoid medications) for the sample collection?
- Will an abnormal result mean I need further tests?
- How could it change the course of my care?
- What will happen next, after the test?

For more detailed information on these and many other tests go to pathologytestsexplained.org.au



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www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au

Pathology Tests Explained is the primary national source of consumer information on pathology testing. Information is written and edited by practising pathologists and scientists, including leading experts. This ensures integrity and accuracy.

Pathology Tests Explained is managed by a consortium of medical and scientific organisations representing pathology practice in Australia. More details at: www.pathologytestsexplained.org.au/about



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My Health Record

You'll find a direct link to the Pathology Tests Explained website embedded in the pathology results pages of your My Health Record.

Click on the link to find information about what your tests are investigating or measuring and what your results can tell your doctor.