

Preventing blood clots in hospital: what you should know

This leaflet outlines the important things you or your carer should know about preventing blood clots, before, during and after your stay in hospital. Your healthcare professional will be able to answer any further questions you may have.

What is a DVT?

Blood needs to clot to stop an injury from bleeding. This is a complex process which can sometimes go wrong so that a clot will form in the wrong place. This usually happens in the deep veins of the leg and is called a deep vein thrombus or DVT.

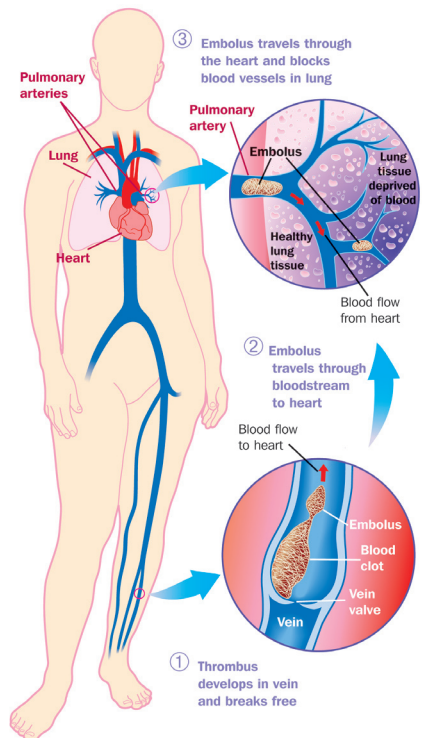
What is a PE?

Sometimes a piece of the clot can break off and travel to the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolus or PE. This can be fatal.

What is a VTE?

Venous ThromboEmbolism (VTE) is the term used to describe a blood clot that can be either a DVT or a PE.

How a blood clot develops



What are the signs and symptoms of a blood clot?

The possible signs and symptoms of a blood clot are:

- Unexplained pain and swelling - usually in one of your legs
- Chest pain when you take a breath
- Breathlessness
- Coughing up blood.

If you experience any of these symptoms, get medical advice straightaway either from your GP or hospital.



Pictured above: The swollen right leg is where a blood clot has developed.

Who is at risk of blood clots?

Although not common, anyone can get a blood clot. You may be more likely to get a blood clot when coming into hospital because of an illness or for an operation. Your risk may also be higher if any of the following apply to you:

- You are overweight
- You smoke
- You are pregnant or have recently had a baby
- You have cancer
- You are on certain medicines (e.g. oral contraceptives, hormone replacement therapy or some other medicines. Ask staff for advice)
- You are not very mobile
- You or a close relative has had a blood clot before
- You have other medical conditions
- You are very ill
- You are having an operation
- You become dehydrated.

This is not an exhaustive list. Please ask your hospital doctor or nurse if you wish to discuss your own personal risk factors.

What can I do to reduce my risk of a blood clot?

Many (but not all) blood clots can be prevented. You can significantly reduce your risk of having a blood clot by:

- Drinking lots of fluids unless advised otherwise. This helps to keep you hydrated
- Keeping as mobile as possible
This means walking, moving your legs or ankles. If this is difficult for you, a physiotherapist can teach you some exercises
- Follow any medical advice given.

Make sure you tell your healthcare team what other medications you are taking no matter how small or insignificant you think these are.

If your hospital admission has been planned several weeks in advance and you are taking HRT or the combined oral contraceptive pill talk to your doctor, as s/he may consider advising you to stop them temporarily before your admission.

Will anything extra be done to reduce my risk while I am in hospital?

Your risk of developing a blood clot will be assessed by staff when you are admitted to hospital and repeated during your stay. This may also be done in pre-assessment clinic if you are having planned surgery.

If you are considered to be at risk of developing a clot your healthcare team will also assess whether bleeding might be a problem for you, in case they need to offer you treatment with a drug to help prevent your clot.

Staff may not need to do anything more than to encourage you to do the things listed in the previous section.

However, if you are considered to be more at risk you may be offered additional treatment. This may include:

- Anti-embolism stockings to put on your legs. These squeeze your legs to help keep the blood moving
- Medication to help prevent blood clots. This will be given as a small daily injection or as a tablet. It is sometimes necessary to continue this treatment at home.

What should I do once I go home?

- Drink plenty of fluids so you don't get dehydrated (unless advised otherwise)
- Keep as mobile as possible. Follow any exercises you have been given
- If you have had stockings fitted, you should continue to wear these until you are at your usual level of mobility
- If you have been given medication to take home to prevent blood clots, further information will be given about this. It is important that you complete the course of this medication and keep your GP informed.

If you take your medication as prescribed it is unlikely to cause any problem. However, contact your doctor if you experience any problems such as bleeding.

- Stopping smoking and maintaining a healthy weight can also help to lower your risk.

What should I do if I think I have a blood clot?

If you develop any symptoms of a blood clot (as listed on page 2), seek medical advice straight away from your GP or hospital. If you do develop a clot there is very effective treatment available.



Who can I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or would like any more information on preventing blood clots, please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist or contact the anticoagulant team in your local hospital.

If you need this leaflet in audio, large print or other languages, please ask any member of staff.

Further information is available from the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE): www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/12695/47198/47198.pdf Telephone 0845 003 7783 or email publications@nice.org.uk. In both cases quote reference N2081.

Published by NHS East of England
Victoria House, Capital Park, Fulbourn, Cambridgeshire, CB21 5XB.
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