

Preventing Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

PATIENT INFORMATION

WHAT IS A DVT?

A DVT is a blood clot that may form in one of the large veins of the body. DVTs happen more commonly in the legs. The blood clot may partly or completely block the flow of blood in that vein. This may cause pain, redness and/or swelling. Some of the clot may travel through the veins to the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolus. A pulmonary embolus can block the blood supply to the lungs and slow the supply of oxygen to the rest of the body.

You are at risk of a blood clot following a surgical operation or procedure.

If any of the following also apply this means you are at a higher risk of a blood clot

- You have had a blood clot in the past
- Someone in your family has had a blood clot
- You are a smoker
- You have had cancer and /or undertaking cancer treatment or therapy
- You have varicose veins
- You have a chronic illness/blood disease
- You are over 40 years old
- You are overweight
- You are pregnant or have recently given birth
- You are on the contraceptive pill
- You are undertaking hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- You are on steroids
- you have not been physically active

Your responsibilities

Please inform medical or nursing staff as soon as possible if you are at a higher risk so that we can discuss a preventative DVT treatment plan with you.

Actions you can take to reduce your risk of a blood clot

- Avoid sitting for long periods of time.
- Walking as often as your doctor or nurses have advised.
- Elevate your legs if you are sitting for moderate periods of time.
- Gently exercising your feet and legs while in bed.
- If you smoke, quit smoking or reduce the amount that you smoke. Nicotine causes your blood vessels to become smaller and the blood flow is decreased.
- If you are overweight, aim to reduce weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Keep hydrated – drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day.

If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms **this is an emergency. Call an ambulance on **111** and inform them that you have had surgery and are showing signs of a blood clot.**

- **Sudden shortness of breath and/or feel pain in your chest**
- **Coughing up blood streaked sputum**

Contact your doctor if you develop any of the following

- Pain and/or swelling in an arm or a leg.
- The pain often starts in your calf and can feel like cramping or a soreness.
- Change of colour in the leg – bluish, purple or reddish skin colour.
- Feeling of warmth on the skin around the affected area.

Diagnosing a DVT

- Physical examination
- Ultrasound scan
- Blood test

Treating a DVT

The main aim is to prevent the clot getting bigger, breaking loose and causing a pulmonary embolism (PE).

Treatment usually includes a combination of medication and compression.

Anticoagulant medications “thin” the blood, by decreasing its ability to clot. They prevent new clots from forming and existing clots from growing larger.

Anticoagulant treatment usually continues for at least 3 months to be fully effective in treating a DVT.

Compression stockings are special types of stocking made from special elastic to give support to the lower legs, encourage circulation and help reduce swelling.

You will need to discuss the use of these with your surgeon as they may not be appropriate for the type of surgery you have had.

Our responsibilities to you

We will assess your risk of a DVT prior and during your time at our hospital.

We will make a prevention plan with you if you are deemed at higher risk.

If you are on medication which may increase your risk (e.g. HRT, oral contraceptives) then we will discuss with you what this means and whether you should consult your GP to stop this medication for a short period of time prior to your surgery.

Before you go home

Ask your doctor or nurse to explain everything you need to know about caring for your recovery after your surgery or procedure.

Make sure you have the name and contact details of the health provider or hospital to call if you develop signs or symptoms of a blood clot.

Your DVT preventative plan on discharge

Compression stockings for _____ weeks.

Aspirin _____ mg orally daily for _____ weeks.

Clexane (Enoxaparin) injection sc _____

Other _____

For more information contact your specialist or GP.