

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 during your stay in hospital. Please keep this information safe, you will need this when you go home.

What is a blood clot?

Blood can become more 'sticky' and form a clot. You cannot see it because it is deep within the veins, often in the legs. This is known as a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). If a piece of the clot breaks away, travels through the bloodstream and lodges in the lung it is known as a pulmonary embolism (PE). This is serious and can be fatal.

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 to have an operation.

Your risk may also be higher if any of the following apply:

- You are overweight
- You smoke
- You are pregnant or have just had a baby
- You have cancer
- You are on certain medicines (e.g. oral contraceptives, hormone replacement therapy)
- You are not very mobile
- You, or a close relative, have had a blood clot
- You have other medical conditions
- You become dehydrated.

What should I do if I think I'm at risk?

If you are known to be at risk of developing a blood clot you may have been:

- Prescribed medicines to help prevent a clot forming.
- Given special stockings to help the circulation in your calves and legs.

You should take your medicine and wear the stockings as you've been directed.

Let staff know immediately if you have any pain or swelling in your leg or if you suddenly experience a shortness of breath and/ or chest pain which is not normal for you.

What can I do to help myself or how can my carer help?

It is very important to keep the circulation moving in your lower legs.

- Keep as active as you can.
- If you are less mobile it's a good idea to do gentle leg exercises:
 - Try moving your ankles around in a circular motion and moving your toes up and down especially if you are chair-bound.
 - If bed-bound flex your feet so you can feel your calf muscles stretching every few hours
- Smoking can increase the risk of a blood clot. If you do smoke you can get help to stop. Ask a healthcare professional for information.

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 GP, nurse or pharmacist.