

Preventing deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Introduction

This leaflet explains how to prevent deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE) both at home and in hospital. If you have any questions about this information, please speak to your doctor.

What are DVT and PE?

DVT is a blood clot in a vein, usually in the legs. Blood clots in your veins can break loose, travel through your bloodstream and get stuck in your lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism. DVT can have serious health consequences, and a PE could be fatal.

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pulmonary-embolism/>

Am I at increased risk of thrombosis?

Please tell your doctor if any of the following risk factors apply to you, as it may affect your treatment plan:

- you have had DVT or PE in the past
- other members of your family have had blood clots
- previous blood tests suggested that you are at increased risk of thrombosis
- you are having treatment for cancer, such as chemotherapy or radiotherapy, or you have cancer that is not in remission
- recent (within the last 3 months) or current COVID infection
- you have a chronic illness, such as lung disease or heart failure, or an inflammatory disease, such as ulcerative colitis
- you are pregnant or have been pregnant in the last six weeks

Am I at increased risk of bleeding?

Please tell your doctor if any of the following apply to you; it will affect your treatment plan:

- you are taking anticoagulant drugs such as warfarin
- you are taking medicine that affects blood clotting, such as aspirin or clopidogrel, or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen or Diclofenac
- you have haemophilia or another known bleeding disorder
- you have a low platelet count
- you have a history of major bleeding or bleeding peptic ulcer

- you have a family history of major bleeding
 - you have recently had a stroke
 - you have very high blood pressure
 - you have severe liver or kidney disease
-

How can I reduce my risk of DVT and PE?

Before coming into hospital

Read the list of risk factors in the 'Am I at increased risk of thrombosis?' section, above, and tell your GP if any of them apply to you. Thrombosis is when blood clots block veins or arteries.

Hormone supplements can increase your risk of thrombosis, so before your surgery talk to either your doctor or GP about stopping them temporarily. Hormone supplements include the oral contraceptive pill, hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or tamoxifen.

When you are in hospital

Your risk of developing hospital-associated thrombosis (HAT) and your risk of bleeding from treatment should be assessed by medical staff when you're admitted to hospital. If you need preventative treatment, it should be started within 14 hours. Treatments may include injections to thin your blood and reduce the risk of clots, like heparin, or anti-embolism stockings or compression leg cuffs (called pneumatic compression devices). In some cases, a blood-thinning tablet may be used after hip or knee surgery instead of injections.

Please read the 'Am I at increased risk of bleeding?' section (above) to find a list of risk factors for bleeding. It is **essential** that once you're in hospital you tell your doctor if any of them apply to you.

It is **very important** to please also tell your hospital team if you have had an allergic reaction to heparin in the past. Heparins are of animal origin so if this is an issue for you, please speak to your doctor.

When you go home

If you are at a particularly high risk of thrombosis, we will advise you to continue taking blood-thinning injections, tablets or using stockings when you leave hospital. We will give you a supply to take home. It is important that you understand and follow the instructions when you use and dispose of these treatments.

For most patients their risk of thrombosis at home can be reduced enough by moving around, staying hydrated and getting back to normal activities as soon as possible. Please let us know if you're unsure of when and how you can move around, and we can help.

Is there anything I should look out for at home?

If you develop any of the following symptoms contact your emergency GP or visit A&E immediately for advice:

- unexplained swelling or discomfort in your legs from the calf upwards
- chest pain
- breathing difficulties
- coughing up blood
- irregular or fast heartbeat

If tests confirm that you have developed a blood clot, we will give you blood-thinning (anticoagulation) medicine.

Blood clots and long-distance travel

- Whilst all forms of long-distance travel can increase the risk of developing blood clots, because you are sitting for a long period of time, your actual risk of developing DVT or PE after a flight is quite low. However, it can be increased if you have other risk factors listed in this leaflet.
- **If you have any concerns about travel, your hospital stays, or your risk of developing DVT or PE, please talk to your doctor.**
- For a video guide to DVT and PE visit: <https://www.uhb.nhs.uk/patients/inpatients/deep-vein-thrombosis-and-pulmonary-embolism.htm>

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:
Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY
Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net
Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team: imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

Medicines
Published: June 2023
Review date: June 2026
Reference no: 5157
© Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust