

Preventing blood clots while you are in hospital and after you leave



Information for patients
Pharmacy



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



Why does blood clot?

When we cut ourselves, we bleed. To stop us from bleeding too much, chemicals in our bloodstream help to form a clot. Sometimes a clot can form in the wrong place.

People who are ill, have surgery or are pregnant are at increased risk of blood clots forming in the wrong place.

What happens if a blood clot forms in the wrong place?

A **deep vein thrombosis (DVT)** is a blood clot in your veins, usually in your leg. This blocks the flow of blood around your body. The symptoms usually only affect one leg and include pain, redness and swelling.

The long term complications can include having a painful swollen leg, leg ulcers and skin discolouration.

A **pulmonary embolism (PE)** is a piece of blood clot that has broken off and travelled to the lungs. It causes chest pain and severe breathing problems. Pulmonary embolism causes permanent lung damage and death in a small number of people.

Who gets blood clots?

Anyone can get a DVT or PE but some people are at a higher risk. You are at increased risk of blood clots if:

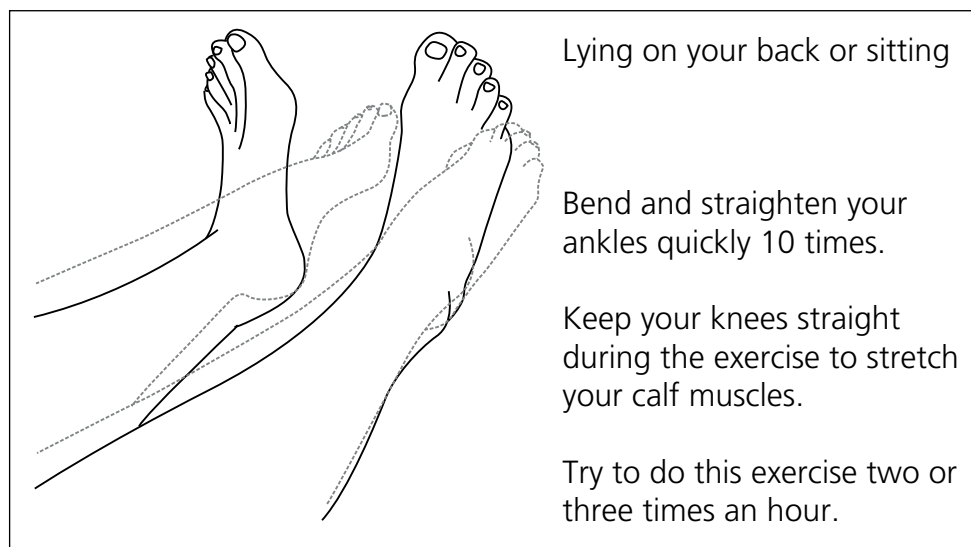
- you or a close relative has had one before
- you are very overweight
- you are over 60 years old
- you take certain medications, including the combined oral contraceptive pill ("the pill") or use a contraceptive patch, or hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- you are dehydrated

- you have recently been on a long journey (more than 4 hours long)
- you have cancer, heart disease or lung disease
- you have thrombophilia (a blood disorder)
- you have a severe infection
- you have a fractured hip
- you are pregnant or have had a baby in the last 6 weeks

What can I do to help prevent blood clots?

You can help reduce your risk of developing a clot by:

- drinking plenty of water or other non-alcoholic drinks to keep hydrated
- moving around as much as you can (if you are not sure how much you can do, then talk to your nurse, doctor or physiotherapist)
- taking any medication you have been prescribed
- wearing the anti-embolism stockings or other devices you are given
- carrying out the following leg exercises (even if you are in bed):



What else can be done to help prevent blood clots?

Your risk of developing a blood clot will be assessed by a doctor or nurse. This will happen either when you come to pre-assessment clinic or when you are admitted to hospital.

If you think that your risk of developing a blood clot has not been assessed, please check with your nurse or doctor.

If you are thought to be at increased risk of developing a blood clot you may be advised to use one or both of the following:

- medication (injection or tablets)
- a device to improve the blood flow in your legs (stockings or another device)

Medication to prevent blood clots

Medication helps to reduce the risk of blood clots, although it cannot stop them happening completely. Some people will need to continue taking the medication after they leave hospital, usually for up to a month but sometimes for longer.

Injections

The most common injection is **low molecular weight heparin** (such as enoxaparin, tinzaparin or dalteparin). It is usually injected once a day into the stomach area.

Low molecular weight heparins are made using ingredients that come from pigs. If you do not want to have this injection for religious or other reasons then please tell your doctor. They will be able to discuss with you whether another type of medication is suitable for you.

Tablets

Rivaroxaban, dabigatran or apixaban tablets may be used after hip or knee replacement surgery. They may also be used if one of your legs is in a cast and you cannot move around much. This is an unlicensed use. Please ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about this if you want to know more.

Warfarin tablets are sometimes used to prevent blood clots after surgery. You will need regular blood tests to make sure you are getting the right dose. If you need to take warfarin, your doctor, pharmacist or nurse will explain more about it.

Side effects of medication

All medication has side effects. One of the side effects of all these medicines is bleeding. You may find that you bruise more easily whilst taking the medication. You should tell your doctor straight away if you get bleeding from a wound.

If you are at risk of bleeding problems your doctor may decide not to prescribe this medication.

The information leaflet in the packet will tell you more about the side effects of your medicine.

Devices that can improve blood flow

Anti-embolism stockings

These special stockings prevent blood from collecting in the veins of your legs. You may need to carry on wearing the stockings for a while after you leave hospital.

A few things to remember while wearing the stockings:

- **Do not fold or roll down the stockings.** This will stop them working and could stop the blood circulating properly in your legs.
- Wear shoes or slippers as the stockings can be slippery on the floor.
- If the stockings are uncomfortable and do not fit properly then tell your nurse.

Not everyone needs to wear the stockings. There are some reasons why people cannot wear stockings, including if they have fragile skin or swollen legs.

Intermittent Pneumatic Compression Device



This is a device that is wrapped around your legs.

It inflates and gently squeezes your legs to improve the blood flow out of your legs.

After you leave hospital

The increased risk of developing a blood clot can carry on for up to 3 months after you leave hospital. You should:

- keep drinking plenty of water or other non-alcoholic drinks to keep hydrated
- keep moving around as much as you can and do the leg exercises described in this leaflet
- take any medication you have been prescribed
- wear the anti-embolism stockings if you have been given them for as long as you have been advised to (usually 6 weeks)

Is there anything I should look out for?

You can still get a deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism, even if you follow all this advice.

Contact a doctor straight away if you:

- have unexplained pain and swelling in your legs
- have chest pain when you take a breath
- are breathless or cough up blood

Who should I contact if I have any concerns?

If you have any questions or concerns about what you have read in this leaflet please ask a nurse or doctor.

After you have left hospital please contact:

Ward _____

0114 _____

or your own GP surgery.

Your questions

If you have any question or concerns please write them down here and bring them with you.



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