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Preventing blood clots

***Information for
patients and carers***

What is this leaflet for?

We have given you this leaflet to explain about blood clots that can, in some circumstances, form in your veins. These clots are sometimes called venous thromboembolisms or VTEs for short.

It is recognised nationally that VTE is an important problem in all hospitals. You will have a risk assessment for VTE during your admission to hospital.

This leaflet describes who is most at risk of VTEs and what you can do to help prevent them.

What is a VTE?

VTE is the name given to a blood clot that forms in the deep veins that run through your body. The most common place for a blood clot to form is in one of your legs. This is called a deep vein thrombosis (a DVT for short).

If a blood clot becomes dislodged, passes through your circulation and reaches your lungs, this is called a pulmonary embolism (a PE for short).

Who is at risk of VTE?

If more than one of the following applies to you, your risk of getting a blood clot when you come into hospital is usually increased:

- You are over 60 years old.
- You have cancer.
- You are dehydrated.
- You have a condition that makes your blood more likely to clot (such as thrombophilia).
- You are overweight.
- You have another medical condition which requires regular treatment.
- You or a close relative have had a previous blood clot.
- You are taking a contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy.
- You are pregnant or have recently had a baby.
- You are less mobile than when you are at home.
- You have recently had or are having an operation, especially on your stomach, hip or knee.
- You are very ill.

What is the treatment to reduce my risk of VTE?

If you are at risk, your doctor or nurse will decide what preventative treatment will be most suitable for you, to reduce the risk of you developing blood clots.

The type of treatment will depend on the outcome of your risk assessment. Your doctor/nurse may prescribe one of the following:

Injections

You may be prescribed an injection, which is usually injected once a day into the skin over your stomach or into the top of your leg. You may have a temporary stinging sensation when the injection is given. This is normal and you are advised not to rub the area around the injection site.

It is unlikely that you will have any side-effects from this treatment. Let your doctor or nurse looking after you know if you have any of the following:

- Blood in your bowel motions or urine.
- Coughing or vomiting blood.
- Heavy or persistent nose bleeds.
- Unexplained visible bruising.

Anticoagulant medicines

There are some newer medicines available that can be taken by mouth. These medicines may be prescribed for you instead of the injections. Unfortunately, these medicines are not suitable for all people and your doctor will discuss if they are appropriate for you.

Stockings

We may ask some patients to wear anti-embolism stockings. If you are asked to wear these stockings, we will measure and fit you with knee or thigh length stockings depending on your leg measurements. We will show you how to wear the stockings. Let your doctor or nurse know if you have any new symptoms in your feet or legs when wearing them (for example redness of your skin or pins and needles in your feet).

Inflatable leg pumps/foot pumps

If you have had an operation, we may ask you to wear a special inflatable sleeve or cuff around your legs or feet while you are in bed. The pumps will inflate automatically, applying gentle pressure at regular intervals. This will improve the blood flow of your legs.

To be effective, these methods of prevention must be given or used correctly. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your doctor or nurse for advice.

What can I do in hospital to reduce my risk?

You can help to reduce the risk of VTE by:

- Changing your position regularly when sitting or lying in bed.
- Getting up and about as soon as possible.
- Following instructions given to you by healthcare staff.

What can I do to reduce my risk of VTE after I leave hospital?

There are some precautions that you can take to reduce your risk of VTE:

- Keep a healthy weight.
- Keep moving or walking; leg exercises are valuable.
- Drink plenty of fluid to keep hydrated.
- If you have received treatment to prevent VTE, follow any advice given to you on the ward.

What symptoms should I look out for?

DVT (deep vein thrombosis)

- Swelling or pain in the leg.
- Calf tenderness.
- Notable heat and redness in the leg.

There are other causes of a painful and swollen calf, particularly after injury or surgery so ask your GP if you are at all concerned.

PE (pulmonary embolism)

- Sudden onset of breathlessness that is unusual for you.
- Chest pain or back pain that is unusual for you.
- Coughing or spitting up blood or blood streaked mucus.
- Any episode of collapse.

What should I do if I have any of the symptoms of a DVT/PE?

Contact your GP immediately for advice or contact NHS 24:

NHS 24
 **111** 

If you are very concerned dial **999**.

Useful websites

www.know-who-to-turn-to.com

Can help you get the right medical assistance when you're ill, injured or have a long term condition.

www.nhsinform.scot

Type "DVT" in the search box for further information.

www.thrombosisuk.org (formerly called Lifeblood)

Has lots of information about blood clots.

Please note that NHS Grampian is not responsible or liable for the quality of the information, resources or maintenance of external websites. Any advice on external websites is not intended to replace a consultation with an appropriately qualified medical practitioner.

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Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet.
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