

PREVENTING BLOOD CLOTS

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS & CARERS

Sometimes blood can pool and thicken inside normal, healthy veins and block the flow of blood through the body. This is known as a blood clot. Blood clots can be minor and have no signs or symptoms, but they can also cause significant health issues and, in some cases, lead to death.

Most blood clots occur in the deep veins of the legs or groin. Occasionally, clots break free from the area and move to other parts of the body, including the lungs. Blood clots that move to the lungs are particularly serious.

Blood clots are a leading cause of preventable death in Australia. Early detection and treatment of clots can help reduce the risk of harm. However, preventing clots is much easier, safer and more effective.

Causes of a blood clot

Being a patient in hospital increases your chance of getting a blood clot, particularly if you are having or have recently had surgery or a procedure, or if you are unable to move around as usual. A clot could occur during your stay in hospital or after you return home following treatment in hospital.

Your risk of developing a blood clot is increased if:

- You are over 60 years old
- You are overweight
- You have had a blood clot before
- Someone in your family has had a blood clot
- You are pregnant, or have recently given birth
- You have cancer or are undertaking cancer treatment
- You are on the contraceptive pill
- You take hormone-replacement therapy
- You have a chronic illness (like heart disease) or a blood disorder.

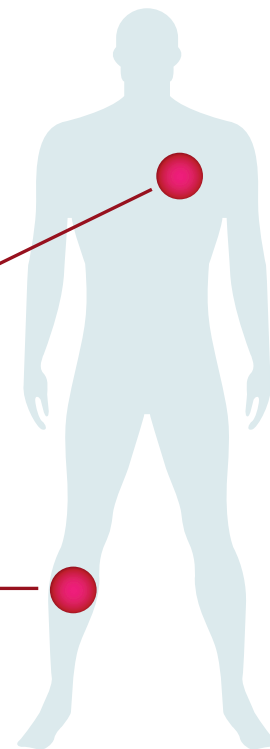
Speak to your doctor if you have any concerns.

Signs and symptoms of a possible blood clot

Tell your doctor or nurse if you experience any of the following:

Chest pain, sudden shortness of breath or coughing up blood-stained mucus

Pain and/or swelling in the legs. Skin may be red or warm to touch



Disclaimer

This fact sheet is for educational purposes only. It should not be used to guide and/or determine actual treatment choices or decisions. Any such decisions should be made in conjunction with advice from your treating doctor or other health professionals.

What you can do to help prevent a blood clot while in hospital



Drink water

Water helps blood flow. Check with your doctor how much water you should be drinking per day.



Stay active

Staying as active as you can will help to keep your blood flowing. Ask your doctor if it's ok to walk around.



Keep your stockings on

If you've been given compression stockings to wear, keep them on as directed.

What your doctor will do

To help prevent you from developing a blood clot, your doctor may need to prescribe an anti-clotting medicine and/or a mechanical device. If you think you are at risk, please discuss with your doctor.

Anti-clotting medicine

This is a medicine that slows down the formation of a clot, making it less likely to form. Your doctor will choose the best medicine suited to you. It may be an injection or tablet that you will be given each day while you are in hospital, or until you start moving around as usual. You may need to continue taking the medicine when you go home.

Mechanical devices

Mechanical devices apply pressure to your legs to help keep the blood moving around. There are many different types of mechanical devices. The most common are compression stockings, intermittent pneumatic compression (IPC) devices and venous foot pumps.

If they become uncomfortable to wear, speak to your doctor or nurse before you remove or adjust them.

Acknowledgements

This information leaflet has been adapted from 'Blood Clots and You', developed by Southern Cross Hospitals, New Zealand.

If you start to develop swelling or pain in either leg, shortness of breath or chest pain, **contact your GP immediately or go directly to an emergency department.**

Medical terms for blood clots

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is the medical term for a blood clot in the deep vein of the arms, legs or groin.

Pulmonary Embolism (PE) is the term for a blood clot that has travelled to the lungs.

DVTs and PEs are collectively known as venous thromboembolism (VTE).

About the VTE Prevention Program

The VTE Prevention Program is run by the Clinical Excellence Commission. It aims to help prevent patients in hospital from developing blood clots (VTE).

The program raises awareness, improves clinical practice, and promotes the risk assessment of all patients and prescription of appropriate treatment to reduce the risk of developing a VTE.

For further information, please visit <http://www.cec.health.nsw.gov.au/programs/vte-prevention>



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