

Risks of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) with lower limb immobilisation

When your leg is immobilised in a plaster cast or walking boot, lack of movement can cause blood clots, called deep vein thrombosis (DVT), to form in your blood vessels.

A DVT itself is not life-threatening, however sometimes part of the blood clot can become dislodged and travel to your lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolus (PE) and can be very serious.

The risk of developing a DVT while your leg is immobilised is small, but you should read and follow this advice.

How can my risks of developing a DVT be reduced?

- Stay as active as possible. If you are unable to walk, try to move your legs and feet and circle your ankles as often as possible.
- Take regular fluids to stop yourself becoming dehydrated (unless advised otherwise).
- If you need to travel on a long journey, try to move your legs regularly. If travelling by car, have a break and walk around every hour or two.

We will assess the risk of you personally developing a DVT while your leg is immobilised. If necessary, we will prescribe blood thinning medication to reduce this risk.

- If this is prescribed, please continue to take this medication until reviewed by the orthopaedic team.

Signs and symptoms of DVT/PE

- Pain in your leg
- Swelling in your leg
- Warm or discoloured skin on your legs
- New shortness of breath/feeling breathless
- Pain in your chest, back, or ribs that is worse when you breathe
- Coughing up blood

If you experience any of these symptoms you should:

- **call 111 for advice on where to attend if the problem is in your leg**
- **return to the Emergency Department as soon as possible if the symptoms are related to your breathing or chest**
- **call 99 if you are acutely unwell.**

The Royal Bournemouth Hospital, Castle Lane East, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH7 7DW
Poole Hospital, Longfleet Road, Poole, Dorset, BH15 2JB

Author: **Laura Jukes** Date: **April 2023** Version: **One** Review date: **April 2026** Ref: **359/21**