University Hospitals Dorset
NHS Foundation Trust

Preventing blood clots in hospital

Patient information

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What are blood clots?

Blood clots that occur in the deep veins of the legs are called a deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Occasionally part of the blood clot can dislodge and go to the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism (PE). DVT and PE can be referred to as venous thromboembolism or VTE

A DVT may cause pain and swelling, and the leg may become hot and red.

A PE can cause difficulty in breathing and pain in the chest.

However, there may be no obvious symptoms. If you are worried, please ask your nurse or doctor.

What causes blood clots?

Just being unwell and being in hospital leads to an increase in the possibility of developing blood clots.

There are several factors which increase the likelihood of you getting a blood clot, these include:

- being immobile, as the blood flow slows down
- dehydration
- having cancer
- having an infection
- undergoing some types of surgery
- being pregnant
- having a condition that increases the tendency for your blood to clot

Every patient who comes into hospital will be assessed for the risk of developing blood clots.

What measures will be taken to help prevent blood clots?

The most important factors in helping to reduce blood clots are keeping well hydrated and mobile. It is very important that whenever possible, you walk or exercise your legs, even if you are in bed or in a chair.

Your doctors might prescribe a drug called low molecular weight heparin. This helps prevent your body from forming blood clots. It is normally given as a small once daily injection. Low molecular weight heparin is a porcine (pig) derivative. Please feel free to speak to a member of staff to discuss this. If you are Muslim, a copy of the Fatwa is available on the Fatwa website: **www.fatwa-online.com**

You may need a pair of anti-embolism stockings. These work by gently compressing your legs which increases the speed of the blood flow and prevents your leg veins from expanding. The stockings should be worn day and night. The stockings should be removed each day to allow your legs to be washed, inspected for any changes and for concerns to be reported immediately.

The stockings should be changed every three days. When moving around, please make sure you are wearing slippers or shoes as the stockings can be very slippery on hard floors. Do not allow your stockings to roll down, as this may cause constriction and impede your blood flow. If you are sent home with the stockings, ensure they are removed daily and washed regularly.

How do I put the stockings on correctly?

1. Place your hand into the stocking as far as the heel
2. Holding the heel, turn the stocking inside out
3. Ease the stocking over your foot and heel. Ensure your heel fits into the heel pocket (purple shaded area)
4. Ease the rest of the stocking up over your ankle, calf and thigh
5. Smooth out any wrinkles and make sure the heel is in the heel pocket and the inspection hole is under your toes / ball of foot.
6. Ensure you can put the stockings on and remove them yourself, or have someone to help you with this.

Note: There is no right or left stocking. Also, you may find placing a small plastic bag over the foot assists in applying the TED stockings. Please ensure the bag is removed once the stocking is on. Follow the washing instructions given to you.

Some patients may need a special device called **intermittent pneumatic compression (IPC)**. IPC is a common mechanical device applied to the lower legs to increase the blood flow. It works by sleeves being applied to the legs and gently inflated and deflated to apply compression - often in the sequence starting with the ankle, then the calf and finishing with the thigh.

Question: Can I decline the measures to prevent blood clots?

You have the right to decline treatment. It is important we make you aware that blood clots that develop in hospital accounts for thousands of deaths annually in the NHS and pulmonary embolism accounts for 50% to 60% of all cases of DVT and PE's. If you are assessed as requiring any of the measures above to prevent blood clots and refuse treatment, this will be documented in your notes

If you are not receiving either stockings or heparin injections, please ask a member of staff to explain why.

Once you go home, if you think you may have symptoms of a DVT or PE, contact your local GP surgery or phone **111**. In the event of an emergency phone **999** or have someone take you to the Emergency Department.

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