

The ROYAL MARSDEN
NHS Foundation Trust

Blood Clot Prevention

A brief guide
for patients
and carers



NHS

What is this leaflet about?

Preventable blood clots can lead to venous thromboembolism (VTE), which affects thousands of patients every year in the UK.

The aim of this leaflet is to inform you of the seriousness of VTE, the symptoms and risk factors to look out for and how you can reduce your risk by having a VTE risk assessment.

There is a larger booklet called *Blood Clot Prevention- A guide for patients and carers* that contains more information. Please ask a nurse for this if you haven't received it through the post and you have had an inpatient admission.

What is VTE?

Usually our bodies form blood clots to stop bleeding when we are injured. When a blood clot forms without injury it is called a **thrombus** and, if this clot is deep inside one of our veins, it is called **deep vein thrombosis (DVT)**.

Sometimes this clot will then become detached and move through the bloodstream and into the lungs. This is called **pulmonary embolism**.

Together, DVT and pulmonary embolism are known as **venous thromboembolism (VTE)** and can be life-threatening. But there are many things you can do to reduce your risk of VTE.

Signs and symptoms of VTE

There are several important signs and symptoms of VTE that you should be looking for. If you experience any pain or swelling in your leg whilst you are an inpatient, inform the ward team. However, if this happens at home, please call your GP for an urgent appointment or attend your local Accident and Emergency department.

Seek help immediately, consider ringing 999 and attend your local Accident and Emergency urgently if you experience any of the following:

- pain in your chest
- shortness of breath
- coughing up blood
- hot or discoloured skin on your legs

What can you do to help prevent VTE?

When you are at home, you can help prevent VTE by:

- Drinking plenty of fluids
- Stopping smoking
- Keeping mobile and performing leg exercises
- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Wearing anti embolic stockings if your mobility is limited

What can we do to help prevent VTE?

A VTE risk assessment will be completed upon your admittance to the hospital and again if your condition changes.

The VTE risk assessment will help your doctor understand your individual risk factors for VTE. Depending on these, your doctor may prescribe intermittent calf pumps or compression stockings designed to help prevent clot formation. Sometimes anticoagulant medication is prescribed; this thins the blood and helps prevent blood clots forming.

Who is at risk of VTE?

Being admitted or staying in hospital increases the risk of VTE. Your risk may be increased if you:

- are undergoing cancer treatment
- are less mobile than usual for more than three days
- are due to have surgery
- are over 60 years old
- are overweight
- smoke
- have previously had a VTE
- have certain blood conditions such as clotting disorders
- are using an oestrogen-containing contraceptive (combined pill)
- are taking hormone replacement tablets
- are dehydrated
- are pregnant
- have varicose veins

Key points to remember

- The Royal Marsden is working hard to reduce your risk of developing a blood clot
- Patients with cancer have a 1 in 5 risk of developing a clot
- Your risk of developing a blood clot can be reduced with the proper precautions and care
- You will need to undergo a VTE assessment upon your admission to the hospital as well as whenever your clinical situation changes
- If you develop a clot you will be referred back to your GP and/or local anticoagulation centre for ongoing anticoagulation management

Resources and more information

For more information about VTE and VTE prevention, ask any member of The Royal Marsden medical team.

You can find more information, including instruction on how to wear compression stockings and guidance about anticoagulant medication in:

Blood Clot Prevention

A guide for patients and carers

Available at the Help Centre

Other online sources of information include:

Anticoagulation Europe

020 8289 6875

www.anticoagulationuk.org

Lifeblood: The Thrombosis Charity

020 7633 9937

www.thrombosis-charity.org.uk

References

This leaflet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this leaflet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Freephone: 0800 783 7176

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk

Should you require information in an alternative format, please contact The Royal Marsden Help Centre.

The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline:

020 8915 6899 (available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

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