

Preventing Deep Vein Thrombosis & Pulmonary Embolism

A blood clot in the vein is a common complication of a hospital stay. This hospital makes every effort to prevent this problem and it is very important that you read and understand the information in this leaflet.

Information Leaflet

We have written this leaflet to explain how the risk of developing venous thromboembolism can be reduced.

It does not replace explanations and information given to you by our staff but we hope you will find it a helpful guide to use before, during and after your stay in hospital. If you have any questions or need further information, please ask.

What Is Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

This is a blood clot that forms within a deep vein in the leg or pelvis. This can be painful and cause leg swelling.

After gynaecological surgery, 1 in 5 patients develop a DVT, if not treated.

A **pulmonary embolism** may occur if part of the clot breaks off and passes into the lungs. This can be a very serious condition, which can cause pain, breathlessness and lack of oxygen in the blood. Pulmonary embolism causes 25,000 deaths each year in hospitalised patients in the UK.

Why Are Hospital Patients At High Risk Of DVT?

During normal daily activity, blood is kept flowing freely through the leg veins by contraction of the calf muscles. This prevents clot formation.

Staying immobile in bed for a long period of time causes a risk of blood clots forming in the leg veins, particularly after an operation.

There are a number of conditions that increase the risk further, which include

- **Pregnancy**
- **Medicines such as birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy and tamoxifen**
- **Obesity**
- **Previous episode of DVT or PE in yourself or a member of your family**
- **Abnormal blood clotting**
- **Heart failure**
- **Kidney failure**
- **Cancer**

Please ask your hospital doctor nurse or midwife if you wish to discuss your own personal risk factors.

What Can I Do To Reduce The Risk Of Developing DVT And PE?

Before coming into hospital

- **Keep mobile** – move around as much as possible in the weeks leading up to your surgery

When you come into hospital

Your clinical team will assess your risk of VTE and consider what can be done to reduce this.

Measures to reduce the risk include:

- **Mobilising (moving around)** – as soon as possible, after surgery or treatment, is important and in many cases will be the only measure you need to take to reduce your risk of VTE.
- **Special stockings** – have been shown to reduce the risk of DVT. These are called anti-embolism or graduated compression stockings. If your team thinks stockings would be helpful you will be fitted with a pair.
- **Medication** – If we think you are at fairly high risk of VTE, then we may give you some medication which stops the blood from clotting too quickly. The drug we normally prescribe is given by an injection under the skin once or twice a day.

If you are already taking anticoagulant medications such as Warfarin then we will only prescribe these other drugs if you have to stop taking your Warfarin for any reason. Please remember to tell your doctor if you are already taking an anticoagulant medication

After I Go Home

If you are prescribed an anticoagulant this may be stopped when you are discharged or you may need to continue for a while at home. If you have had stockings fitted you should continue to wear these until you are fully mobile.

Try not to become dehydrated and keep as active as you can.

What Are The Possible Symptoms Of VTE And What Should I Do If I Have Them?

If you have:

- Unexplained pain and swelling in your legs
- Chest pain when you take a breath
- Breathlessness
- Coughing up blood

Seek medical advice straightaway either from your GP or hospital

If you develop DVT or PE, anticoagulant medication (medication to thin your blood) is very effective at treating the problem.

Who Can I Contact For More Information?

If you have any questions or would like any more information, please just ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist or in an emergency, for advice contact the:

Gynaecology Emergency Department

Tel: 0151 702 4140

Maternity Assessment Unit

Tel: 0151 702 4413

Liverpool Women's is a smoke free site. Smoking is not allowed inside the hospital building, grounds, car parks or gardens. If you would like advice about stopping smoking please ask a member of staff.

This leaflet can be made available in difference formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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