

Preventing Venous Thromboembolism or “VTE”



UHN

(Blood clots in veins, also known as Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism)

This brochure will help you to understand:

1. What a Deep Vein Thrombosis (blood clot in a vein) is and, how it can form in your body
2. What Pulmonary Embolus (a blood clot that has broken off and travelled to the lungs) is and, how it can form in your body
3. What your healthcare team at University Health Network (UHN) will do to help prevent a blood clot from happening to you
4. What you can do to help stop a blood clot from forming in your body

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information:

www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

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Why should I be worried about blood clots?

Blood clots are common, may cause serious harm to the body and, may even cause death. Blood clots can happen in many people, but are most common in those who are ill, in people who need to be in hospital or, in those who need to have surgery.

Blood clots that form in the veins in the legs and lungs are different than blood clots that form in the arteries of the body.

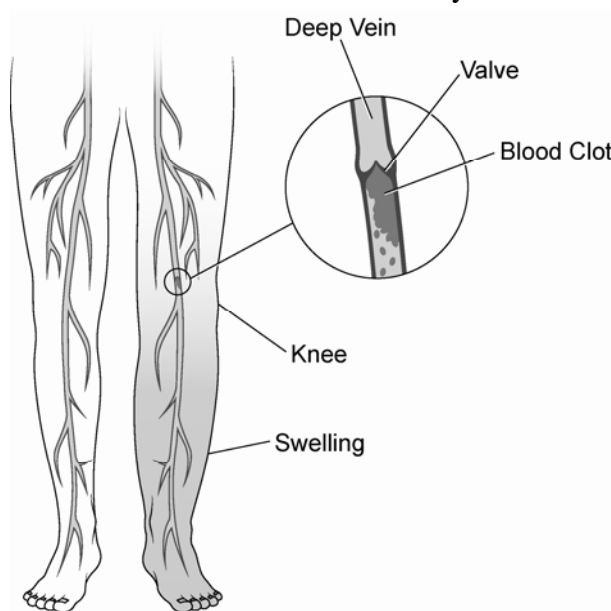
- Blood clots that form in the deep veins are called deep vein thrombosis or “DVT.”
- Blood clots that break off from a DVT and travel to the lungs are called pulmonary embolism or “PE.”
- Blood clots that form in the arteries can cause heart attacks, strokes or both.

Since clots in veins and arteries are different, the risk factors, prevention and treatment for each of these types of clots are also different.

This brochure will only talk about blood clots in veins (DVT and PE.)

What is Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

Deep vein thrombosis (throm-boh-sis), also known as DVT, is an abnormal blood clot. If blood clots form, they usually form in the deep veins of the leg, pelvis or both. They can occur in other veins in the body as well.

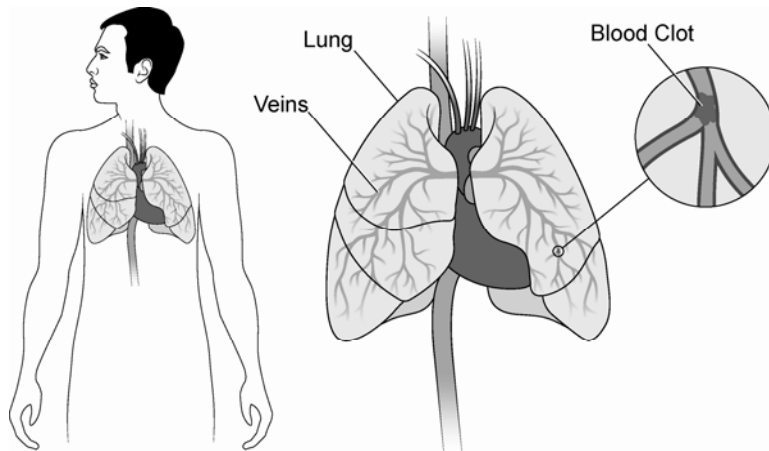


Symptoms:

- Redness
- Swelling

What is Pulmonary Embolism (PE)?

A blood clot in a deep vein can break off and travel through the blood stream and lodge in the lungs. This travelling blood clot is called an “embolus” [em-buh-luh s]. This is a serious condition called “Pulmonary Embolism” (Pull-mun-ary em-buh-liz uh m) or “PE.” A PE can cause damage to the lungs and other organs, impair oxygen supply to the body, cause pain and, can strain your heart. A PE can even cause death.



Symptoms:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain that is worse when breathing in
- Coughing up blood

What are my risk factors for a DVT or PE?

There are many factors that can increase your risk of DVT and PE, including:

- A past history of DVT or PE, or both
- Family history of DVT or PE, or both
- Recent surgery
- Acute or chronic heart or lung conditions
- Cancer and most types of cancer treatments
- Major injury or bone fractures
- Slow blood flow in the deep veins from lack of movement, such as if you are on bed rest, from an illness or if you have been travelling for a long time
- Pregnancy
- Smoking
- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- Birth control pills (BCP)
- Age 40 years and older
- Hereditary or acquired clotting disorders that can make you more likely to develop blood clots in veins

- For example: Factor V Leiden or Prothrombin Variant, Protein S deficiency, Protein C deficiency, and /or Antithrombin deficiency
- If you are overweight
- A central venous catheter line or a PICC line placed in a vein

What are the signs and symptoms of DVT or PE?

Symptoms of a possible DVT may include all, or any of the following:

- Swelling of your leg, arm or both, but only on one side of your body
- Unexplained pain or tenderness in your leg or arm
- Skin that is red, warm to touch, or both

Symptoms of a possible PE may include all, or any of the following:

- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Sharp chest pain, especially when breathing in
- Coughing up blood
- Fever

If you have any of these symptoms, tell your doctor or nurse right away.

What is my UHN healthcare team doing to help prevent me from getting a DVT or PE?

The UHN is committed to your safety. Here are a few of the things we will do to help prevent a blood clot from happening to you:

- You will be assessed for risk factors for blood clots
- You may be given anticoagulants (an-te-ko-ag-u-lants) (“blood-thinning” medication) either by injection or, by mouth to prevent blood clots
- If you are able, you will be asked to get out of bed and walk about frequently
- You may be given compression stockings (“TEDS”) to wear if you need them
- If you are having surgery, you may need to wear “sequential compression devices” (SCDs) on your legs to increase blood flow in your veins

What can I do to prevent DVT and PE?

It is important, if you are able, to do as much as you can to prevent a DVT or PE from happening to you. This list will help you take part in your care if you need to come to the hospital in future, if you are in the hospital now and, will also offer some general tips on preventing blood clots.

If your hospital admission has already been planned:

- Tell your healthcare team if you have ever had a blood clot in the past
- Tell your healthcare team if a family member has ever had a blood clot in the past
- Talk to your healthcare team about your risk factors (listed on page 4)
- Tell your healthcare team that you would like to prevent blood clots

If you are in hospital:

- **Tell your healthcare team if you have any signs or symptoms of a blood clot right away (see page 5).**
- Ask your doctor or nurse, “What is being done to lower my risk of getting a blood clot?”
- Take the anticoagulant or “blood-thinning” medication if given to you. This will lower the chance of abnormal clotting of blood in your veins.
- Wear your compression stockings (“TEDS”), if you have been asked to do so.
- Drink plenty of fluids, but check with your nurse first to make sure that this is right for you.
 - If you have just had surgery, you may be getting fluids through your intravenous (IV). Check with your nurse to see how much fluid you can drink by mouth.
- Move your legs often and, walk as soon as your healthcare team says it is safe to do so.

Leg Exercises

It is important to do these exercises when you are lying in bed and, especially when you are sitting in a chair.

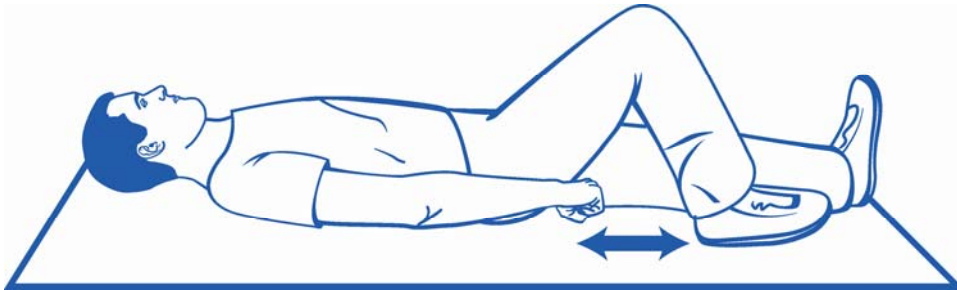
1. Push your toes down towards the foot of the bed.
2. Relax your feet.
3. Pull your toes up towards your chin.
4. Relax your feet.
5. Move your ankles in a circle. Do this in each direction.
6. Rest briefly, and then repeat steps 1 through 5.



Repeat these exercises 10 times every hour while awake. Do these exercises until you can walk and move around as normal. Once your condition is stable, your family can help you walk.

Leg Slides

1. Lying on your back, slide legs up and down bending your knees.
2. Repeat one leg at a time, with your heel slightly off the bed.
3. Repeat 5-10 times every hour.



- You can watch a video of these Leg exercises on Channel 78 on your bedside TV (Channels 78 and 76 at TGH).
 - No cable TV subscription is needed. Ask your nurse for a “PE TV” schedule and tune in.
- You can watch a video of these exercises online.
 - Log on to www.uhnpatienteducation.ca and click on “List of Videos” on upper right side of site. Then, scroll down the list to “Leg exercises”.
- If you are a surgery patient, these exercises can also be found in your “My Surgery” binder in the “After my Surgery” section.

Other ways I can help prevent a blood clot

- Stay as active as possible
- Don't smoke or, stop smoking if you do
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Take your medication ("blood thinners" or anticoagulants) to prevent blood clots as given to you by your healthcare team

Where can I find more information about DVT and PE?

Please talk to your healthcare team about any questions or concerns that you may have.

Internet information sources:

North American Thrombosis Forum (NATF)	www.natfonline.org
ClotCare	www.clotcare.com
National Alliance for Thrombosis and Thrombophilia	www.stoptheclot.org
The American Venous Forum	www.veinforum.org
National Blood Clot Alliance	www.stoptheclot.org
Thrombosis Interest Group of Canada	www.tigc.org

Parts of this brochure have been adapted from:

- National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- National "Stop the Clot" Alliance

Questions:
