

# Preventing Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) and Pulmonary Embolism (PE)

For some people, being admitted to hospital can increase the chances of developing a blood clot in the veins. This leaflet is about how we can work with you to reduce the chances of a problem happening.



By your side

## What is Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

- We need our blood to be able to clot if we cut ourselves, or have an operation, but sometimes an unwanted clot can form in the deep veins of the leg. This is called a deep vein thrombosis (or DVT for short).
- Symptoms of a DVT include pain, stiffness or aching in the calf or thigh. The leg may be swollen and there can be changes in the skin colour.



## What is Pulmonary Embolism (PE)?

- A pulmonary embolism (or PE for short) is when part of a clot breaks off from a DVT and travels through the blood stream to the lungs. It blocks the blood vessels to the lungs and can be very serious, even lifethreatening, if not treated.
- Symptoms of a PE include sudden, unexplained breathing difficulty (even when resting) and sharp chest pain, which may be worse on breathing in.

## What are the risk factors for DVT and PE?

Being unwell, or needing to be admitted to hospital can increase the risk but there are also some other risk factors:

- A previous history of DVT or PE in yourself or close family members.

- Having a known clotting tendency found on a blood test (thrombophilia).
- Age over 60 years (or over 35 years if pregnant)
- Being overweight.
- Immobility (not being able to move around easily).
- Having cancer.
- Having a medical condition, for example: heart or lung disease, lupus (SLE) or inflammatory bowel disease.
- Being on oral contraceptive pill (combined pill, containing oestrogen) or Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT).

**Being pregnant increases the risk of DVT and PE, but there are also other specific risk factors in pregnancy:**

- Pre-eclampsia.
- Having twins (or more!).
- Having a caesarean section, or other surgery during pregnancy.
- Excessive blood loss at, or after, the delivery.



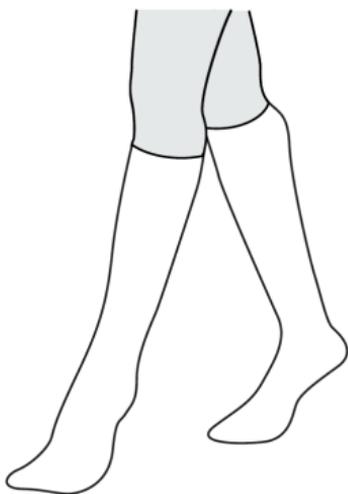
## **What can you do to reduce your risk?**

- Tell the staff about any family or personal history of DVT / PE.
- Try to keep as mobile as possible while you are in hospital and after you go home (moving about keeps the blood circulating well in the legs and lessens the chance of a clot forming).
- Keep well hydrated, drink plenty of fluids (when you are allowed to eat and drink).
- After surgery, you may be fitted with elastic support stockings, please wear them for

the recommended time as they do help to prevent clots. Let a member of staff know if they don't fit properly or are uncomfortable. They should be worn until you are back to your normal level of mobility. They can be washed regularly.

## What can the hospital do to reduce your risk?

- When you are admitted to hospital, a nurse or midwife will complete a checklist of your risk factors.
- They may recommend that you wear elastic support stockings.
- If you seem to be at increased risk, a doctor may prescribe some blood thinning injections, called Clexane, to be given over the highest risk time after the operation (or birth).
- The injections may need to be continued after going home from hospital, and the staff will show you (or a relative, if you prefer) how to give these yourself. It is very simple and most people manage without any problem.



## After you go home from hospital

The risk of DVT and PE may still be increased after you are discharged from hospital;

- Carry on with the precautions of being as mobile as possible and avoid dehydration
- Continue to wear the support stockings for the recommended time
- Give the full course of blood thinning injections
- When you are resting, put your feet up (ideally, lie on the sofa with your legs on a pillow or cushion)

If you think you have got a DVT or PE, you should get urgent medical attention from your GP or A&E.

If you are very unwell, you should telephone 999.

Remember, most women who are admitted to hospital won't have any problems with DVT or PE, but simple precautions can help to reduce the risks. If you, or someone you know, would like further information, please see: Thrombosis UK, [www.thrombosisuk.org](http://www.thrombosisuk.org)

Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham website has a short video about preventing DVT and PE in hospital  
[www.uhb.nhs.uk/hospital-acquired-dvt.htm](http://www.uhb.nhs.uk/hospital-acquired-dvt.htm)

---

**Birmingham Women's Hospital**  
Mindelsohn Way  
Birmingham B15 2TG  
Website: [www.bwc.nhs.uk](http://www.bwc.nhs.uk)

---

Author: Pam Jordan, Will Lester  
Reviewed by: Juliette Webster  
Reviewed and updated: June 2017  
Next Review: June 2020  
Ref No: 192



By your side