What You Should Know About Blood Clots
Risk Factors, Prevention, and Treatment

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Table of Contents

If You've Never Had a Blood Clot
- What You Need to Know About Blood Clots ............3
- Personal Blood Clot Risk .................................4
- Blood Clot Symptoms ....................................7
- Preventing Blood Clots ...................................8

If You've Had a Blood Clot
- What You Need to Know About Blood Clot Treatments .........................................................10
- Support After a Blood Clot ................................18
- Preventing Future Blood Clots ........................20
What You Need to Know About Blood Clots

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE) are blood clots.

A **DVT** is a blood clot that forms in the deep veins of your body, usually in the leg or arm. If the clot breaks free and moves to the lungs, it can block blood supply and make it hard for oxygen to get to the rest of your body. This is called a **PE**.

DVT and PE blood clots can happen to anybody at any age and cause serious illness or even death. It’s important to know and understand your risks for blood clots. This can lead to early diagnosis and treatment, which can help prevent more serious problems. This booklet will help you and your family members or caregivers better understand:

- Your risk for blood clots
- How to identify symptoms
- How to decide on the best treatment if you have a blood clot
Personal Blood Clot Risk

What Is My Personal Blood Clot Risk?

Your personal risk for blood clots can change over time. Some risk factors you can’t change, like your family history or age. Other risk factors can be changed, like quitting smoking. There are some risk factors that may come and go during your lifetime, like taking a long plane trip or taking certain medicines.

⚠️ The more risk factors you have, the greater your risk for blood clots!

Learn about your personal risk for blood clots by visiting www.acponline.org/clotrisk.
Personal Blood Clot Risk

Risk Factors You Cannot Change:

• Having a family history of blood clots (blood relative who has had blood clots in the past or a blood clotting disorder)
• Being over 60 years of age (note: you are at risk at any age, but your risk increases when you are over 60)
• Having a personal history of blood clots (you had a blood clot in the past)

Risk Factors You Can Work to Change:

• Smoking
• Being overweight or having obesity

Risk Factors You May Have During Your Lifetime:

• Being immobile (sitting or lying down for long periods of time)
• Being sick in bed for more than a day, or paralyzed
• Traveling in cramped spaces for more than 4 or 5 hours (such as on a plane or train)
• Having recent major surgery, especially on your pelvis, abdomen, hip, or knee
• Having medical trauma, such as a fall or accident, causing broken bones or muscle injuries
• Being pregnant or recently giving birth (within the last 6 weeks)
• Having cancer
• Using hormone-based medicines, like birth control or estrogen medicines
• Having an implanted device, like a pacemaker or defibrillator
Use this chart to note your personal risk factors for blood clots and share with your health care professional.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not Sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a blood relative who has had blood clots or a clotting disorder?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you overweight or do you have obesity?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Are you confined to a bed or do you sit for more than 4 or 5 hours at a time?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had recent major surgery (within the last 6 months)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had a recent medical trauma, like a fall or accident?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you pregnant or did you recently give birth (within the last 6 weeks)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you over 60 years of age?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you smoke?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you have cancer?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you take hormone-based medicines, such as birth control or estrogen?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have an implanted device (such as a pacemaker)?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had a blood clot in the past?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What Are Symptoms of DVT and PE Blood Clots?

With DVT blood clots, you may or may not notice any symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they will be in the part of your body where the clot is, such as the arm or leg. Symptoms may include:

- Swelling
- Pain
- Redness
- Tenderness

If the clot moves to your lungs (PE), symptoms may include:

- Trouble breathing
- Fast or abnormal heartbeat
- Chest pain or discomfort, that gets worse during deep breaths or coughing
- Anxiety
- Coughing up blood
- Feeling lightheaded or fainting

What Do I Do if I’m Having Symptoms of a Blood Clot?

If you have any emergency symptoms, like trouble breathing, you should call 911 and get care right away. If you have any other symptoms that could be a blood clot, follow up with your health care professional.

To diagnose DVT or PE, you may need blood tests and imaging tests, such as an ultrasound or CT scan.
Preventing Blood Clots

**Move When You Can**

When you are sitting or lying down for too long, your muscles aren’t moving and helping to circulate blood. This can cause clots to form. For example, during long periods of travel in a plane, train, or car, it’s important to get up and move around.

- Try to get up and walk around every hour.
- Walk up and down the aisles on a plane or train.
- If you are driving, stop every hour or so and walk around a bit.
- Change positions often.
- Try not to cross your legs, as this can slow down blood flow.
- Drink lots of water.

If you can’t walk around, there are some easy exercises that can work the muscles in your legs.

- Stretch your legs.
- Raise and lower your heels.
- Move your legs or feet in a circle.
- Flex your feet.
- Curl or press your toes down.

Preventing Blood Clots

Regular Exercise

If you are inactive, being more active can reduce your risk for blood clots. It’s important to exercise regularly. Exercising lowers your risk for clots. Try an exercise or activity you will enjoy. Make small changes one step at a time. Increasing activity will also keep your weight in check.

- Try dancing, walking, swimming, or riding a bike.
- Exercise with a friend. This will help you stay motivated.
- Park farther away from stores or work. You’ll walk more.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.

Quit Smoking

Smoking slows down blood flow and increases your chances of developing clots. Talk to your health care professional about ways to quit smoking.
If you've had a blood clot, there are different treatment options. Treatment for blood clots will:

- Stop new blood clots from forming
- Prevent existing blood clots from growing

Treatment will not completely dissolve your clot. Your doctor will discuss with you what will happen to the existing clot over time. There are many types of treatments for blood clots. You and your health care professional will decide together on what treatment is best for you. Some of the treatment options include medicines, surgery, and other procedures.
Medicines for Treating Blood Clots

A common treatment for blood clots is blood thinner medicines. Blood thinners help to prevent new clots and clots you already have from getting bigger. Patients are sometimes treated with blood thinners by injection or through an IV in the hospital. After a few days, you may be discharged with both injections and pills. You and your health care professional will decide the best treatment for you after discharge.

How long your treatment with blood thinners lasts can vary. It is based on what your health care professional recommends and what works best for you. Some patients may need to stay on blood thinners forever.
Blood Thinners: Risks and Benefits

Blood thinners reduce the risk for forming or growing clots. However, they also increase the risk for bleeding. Some bleeding may be minor, but it can also be serious and cause you to need emergency care.

There can be risks or side effects when taking medicines to prevent blood clots, but these can usually be managed. Talk to your health care professional about choosing the right medicine for you and the best way to take it. Make sure to discuss different interactions with food, over-the-counter medicines, and prescription medicines.
Warfarin is a common blood thinner that your doctor may recommend. There are also other types of blood thinners. Use the chart below to help you and your doctor discuss which medicine is best for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Warfarin (Coumadin&lt;sup&gt;®&lt;/sup&gt;)</th>
<th>Other Blood Thinners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Interactions</td>
<td>Vitamin K—found in leafy green vegetables. Important to eat the same amount and type each week.</td>
<td>No known interactions with food.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Interactions</td>
<td>Over-the-counter: Herbal and dietary supplements (ginger, ginseng and garlic); anti-inflammatory (ibuprofen and naproxen; cold medicines). Prescription: Antineoplastic (cancer), heart, antifungal, steroids, antibiotics, and antidepressant medicines.</td>
<td>Talk to your health care professional about possible interactions with current medicines. Other blood thinners can have severe side effects if not monitored correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blood Tests</td>
<td>Requires regular blood tests called INRs to make sure you are on the right dose and that your blood is not too thick or thin.</td>
<td>Occasional blood tests to make sure your blood, liver, and kidneys are working normally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costs</td>
<td>Lower cost (depending on your insurance benefits).</td>
<td>Higher cost (depending on your insurance benefits).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Side Effects</td>
<td>Bleeding and bruising (talk to your health care professional about your risk for bleeding).</td>
<td>Bleeding and bruising (talk to your health care professional about your risk for bleeding). Possible stomach discomfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storage</td>
<td>Can be stored in a pill organizer.</td>
<td>Dabigatran needs to be kept in its bottle. All others can be stored in a pill organizer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Blood Clot Treatments

Taking Your Medicines

It’s important to take all medicines as prescribed. Not taking your medicines increases your chance of another blood clot. Don’t stop taking any of your medicines without talking to your health care professional first. They can help.

The following tips can help remind you to take your medicines when you need to.

• Put your medicine in the same, easy-to-find place and take it at the same time every day. Keep medicines in a safe and dry location and out of reach of children and pets.

• Pill organizers can help you keep track of medicines and stay on a daily pill schedule. You can get these at the pharmacy.*

• It’s important not to skip a dose of your medicine. Ask your health care professional what to do if you’ve missed a dose.

• Notify your health care professional when you have a change in medicines or start taking over-the-counter medicines, herbs, or supplements.

• If you’re having trouble paying for medicines, your doctor or pharmacist can help.

Keep a list of your current medicines and their dosages (this includes prescription, over-the-counter, herbs, and dietary supplements). Use the medicine log on pages 15 and 16 and make copies for future use. Take this to your doctor’s appointments to make sure they have the same list.

*Dabigatran needs to be stored in its original bottle.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Medicine</th>
<th>Dosage</th>
<th>Size, Shape, &amp; Color</th>
<th>How Much</th>
<th>When to Take/How to Use</th>
<th>What I Use It For</th>
<th>Start/Stop Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Warfarin</td>
<td>5mg</td>
<td>small, oval, peach color</td>
<td>1 pill</td>
<td>Take by mouth, every morning</td>
<td>Blood thinner</td>
<td>4/1/13-</td>
<td>Don’t skip doses, be consistent with green veggies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Medicine</td>
<td>Dosage</td>
<td>Size, Shape, &amp; Color</td>
<td>How Much</td>
<td>When to Take/How to Use</td>
<td>What I Use It For</td>
<td>Start/Stop Date</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/5/12</td>
<td>500 mg</td>
<td>big, round, orange</td>
<td>1 pill</td>
<td>Take by mouth, every morning</td>
<td>Daily vitamin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example: Vitamin C
Surgery and Other Treatments

You may need surgery or other procedures to help remove or stop blood clots.

- If you have a large clot that is life-threatening, you may have a catheter inserted into your veins to remove the clot. A catheter is a small, flexible tube.
- A small filter, called an inferior vena cava (IVC) filter, may be put into a large vein (the vena cava) to help catch any clots and stop them from going to the lungs. This filter is taken out of the body after a few months. This is usually done with patients who aren’t able to take blood thinners.
- In rare cases, surgery is needed to remove a clot.

Compression Socks or Stockings

Compression stockings can help prevent swelling from a clot.

![Image of compression stockings on leg](image_url)
Support After a Blood Clot

It’s normal to feel anxious, depressed, or afraid after you’ve been diagnosed with blood clots. These feelings may last several weeks. If your symptoms don’t improve or you feel like you may want to harm yourself, speak with your health care professional. There are ways they can help.

Where Can I Find Support?

Coping with a serious medical condition can be hard. It may help to speak with others who are going through something similar. You are not alone! Many online communities can connect you with other people who have had a blood clot. By sharing your story, or hearing other patient’s stories, you may feel less alone. Online support groups also help patients connect and learn from each other. Don’t be afraid to ask for help.

- **The National Blood Clot Alliance**:  
  https://www.stoptheclot.org/category/stories/patient-stories
- **The National Blood Clot Alliance Support Community**:  
  www.inspire.com/groups/national-blood-clot-alliance/
- **This Is Serious Support Community**:  
  http://thisisserious.org/support
- **North American Thrombosis Forum**:  
  www.natfonline.org/patients/support-group/support-group/

There may be support groups that meet in person. Ask your health care professional if he or she knows of any local groups.
Information for Caregivers

Blood clots can affect both patients and those who love and support them. Here are some helpful tips if you are someone who takes care of a person who has had a blood clot:

• Help your loved one with medicines. Keep an updated medicine list (see pages 15 and 16).

• Keep a calendar or planner with doctor appointments and blood tests. Note the health care professional’s name, address, and phone numbers.

• Make lifestyle changes together. Help each other set goals for diet and exercise.

• Know the signs and symptoms of a blood clot and what to do in the event of an emergency.

In addition to caring for a loved one, it’s important to take care of yourself. Being a caretaker is hard work. Be sure to take time for yourself to rest and relax. Talk with friends, family, or your health care professional if you feel overwhelmed.
Preventing Future Blood Clots

People who have had a blood clot in the past are more likely to have a clot in the future. In addition to staying on your treatment plan, there are other things you can do to help prevent future blood clots. Visit pages 8 and 9 for tips on how you can change your lifestyle to prevent future blood clots.
Acknowledgments

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