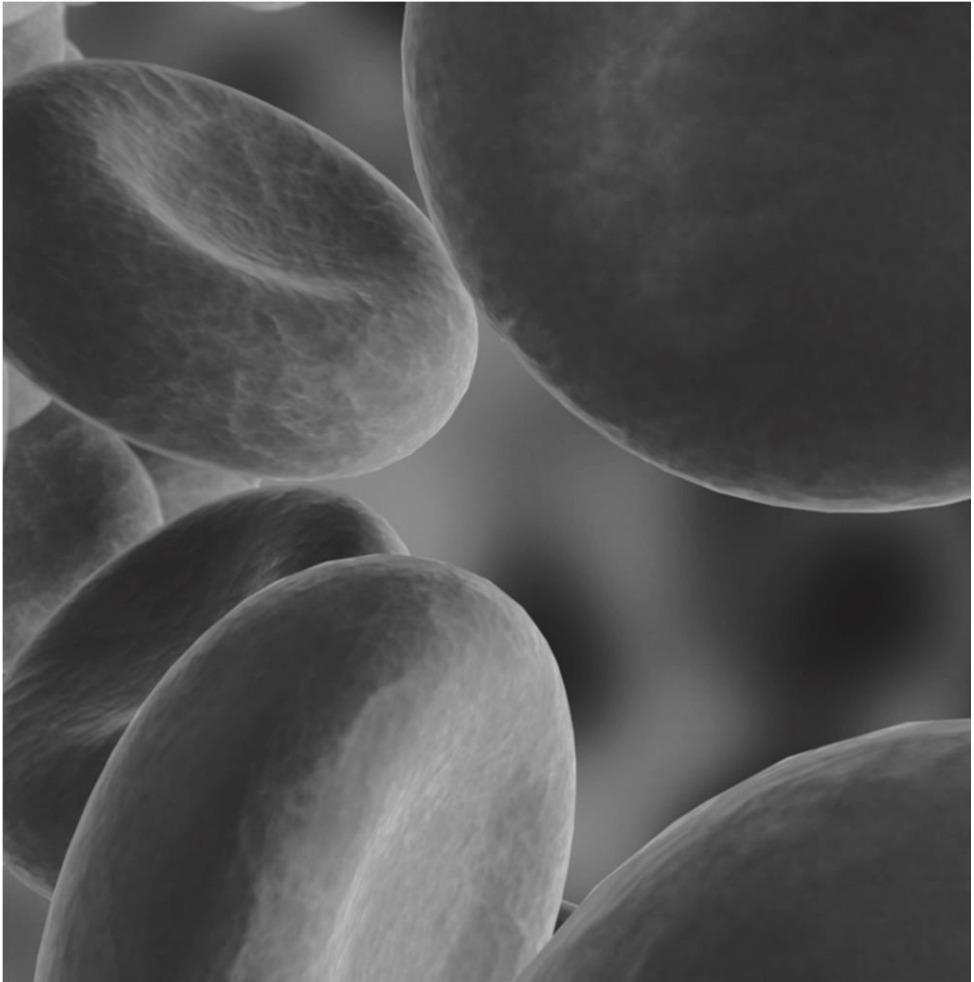


Oxford Haemophilia & Thrombosis Centre

Preventing blood clots while in hospital

Information for patients



What is a Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

A DVT is the name given to a blood clot which forms inside a vein that is deep beneath the skin of your leg, or sometimes in your pelvis.

The clot obstructs the flow of blood through the affected vein and can cause swelling or pain.

Sometimes, part of the clot breaks off and passes through your circulation and reaches your lung. This is called a Pulmonary Embolism (PE), which can cause shortness of breath and chest pain.

Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) is the collective name for DVT and PE.

Is VTE serious?

VTE can be a very serious and potentially life threatening condition.

What causes blood to clot?

Blood clotting is vital to ensure that when we cut ourselves a clot forms to stop bleeding. There are times when the clotting process goes wrong, and blood clots inside our veins causing a DVT.

This is more likely to happen when the blood flow around the body is slower or when the blood becomes sticky – for example, when we stay in bed for a few days or when veins are injured during an operation.

What are the symptoms of VTE?

Typical symptoms are leg swelling, pain calf tenderness and redness. Other symptoms include chest pain, feeling short of breath and coughing up blood. However, a VTE can occur without any symptoms.

Who is at risk of VTE?

There are factors which place you at greater risk of a VTE.

These include:

- Reduced mobility – especially if you are having an operation or unwell enough to be confined to bed
- There is a family or personal history of VTE
- You have a medical condition, e.g. heart failure or diabetes
- You have cancer
- You take certain medications, such as the contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy
- You are aged over 60.

What you can do to reduce the risk of

developing a VTE

Before you come into hospital:

- Talk to your GP about medication, especially if you are taking the contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy. Your GP may advise you to stop taking them in the weeks before your operation.
- Keep to a healthy diet
- Stop smoking.

During your stay in hospital:

- Ask your doctor or nurse "What is being done to reduce my risk of a VTE?"
- Keep moving around, especially after surgery. In many cases this will be the only measure you need to take to reduce your risk of VTE
- Exercise your legs while you are in bed
- Drink plenty of water.

If you are considered to be at risk, your doctor might consider giving you a drug called heparin, which is a small injection. Possible side effects can be bruising at the injection site and prolonged bleeding from any cut to the skin.

You may be advised to wear anti-embolic stockings. You will be measured for these stockings and shown how to wear them.

Please report any new symptoms in your feet and legs to your nurse or doctor.

You may be asked to wear a special inflatable sleeve or cuff around your lower leg while in bed. This inflates automatically and provides pressure at regular intervals.

At Home:

Once you get home, it is important to:

- Keep moving around
- Drink plenty of water
- Continue with leg exercises

If you are asked to continue taking heparin when you go home you will be given more information. Be aware that your risk of developing blood clots can continue for up to 3 months after you have gone home.

Exercises

The following exercises are intended to help your circulation and breathing.

Ankles: Paddle your feet up and down and circle them around and around.

Knees: Brace your knees so that you can feel the muscle tighten on the front of the thigh. Hold for a count of 3 and gently relax. **Bottom:** Clench your buttock muscles together and hold for a count of 3 before relaxing.

Breathing: Place your hands on the side of your rib cage. Take a deep breath and feel your ribs being pushed out to the side as you expand your lungs.

How to contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about VTE, please contact Thromboprophylaxis Nurse or Thrombosis Team:

Direct line: Tel: **01865 857519** or **01865 225629**

Further Information

The National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) have produced guidelines on reducing the risk of thromboembolism for patients in hospital. Information for patients and carers on this topic can be found at:
<http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/12695/47199/47199.doc>

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

Thromboprophylaxis Nurse
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