

Reducing the Risk of Blood Clots

Patient Information – Department of General Surgery

Why you need to know about clots

If a blood clot forms in your leg (deep vein thrombosis), it can affect blood flow, and may cause severe pain and swelling. It may also cause permanent damage to your leg. If a blood clot forms, some of it may travel through your veins to your lungs and block their blood supply (pulmonary embolism). Without blood, your lungs cannot send oxygen to the rest of your body. You may have trouble breathing or, in rare cases, you may die.

Studies have shown that treatment will reduce the chance of you developing a blood clot. The following list shows the main things that put you at risk of developing a blood clot in the leg or lung:

- Hip or knee replacement surgery
- Prolonged surgery
- Stroke
- Heart Failure
- Cancer
- Severe lung disease
- Severe infection or inflammation
- Having a previous blood clot in the leg or lung
- Oral contraceptive pill

What your health care team will do

At your pre-admission appointment or at the time of admission, the risk of a blood clot forming in your legs or lungs will be assessed. Your level of risk will depend on:

- Your age
- Your type of surgery
- Any other health problems you have had in the past

Ask your doctor or nurse about your level of risk for developing a blood clot. If you are at risk, your health care team will discuss treatment options with you. Treatment may include:

- Wearing compression stockings
- Using a compression pump on your lower legs during surgery
- Taking tablets or injections to help prevent a blood clot, this can sometimes include after discharge from hospital
- Gently exercising your feet and legs while in bed

- Getting out of bed and walking as soon as possible
- Some of these treatments may not be suitable for some people. If you are at high risk, your healthcare team may recommend more intensive treatment

Ask your doctor or nurse what treatments they recommend for you.

What you can do to reduce the risk of blood clots forming

While you are in hospital you should:

1. Make sure you get any tablets or injections your doctor has prescribed to reduce your risk
2. Keep your compression stockings on
3. Read the patient information pamphlet on TED stockings
4. Avoid sitting or lying in bed for long periods
5. Walk as often as your doctor advises
6. Drink plenty of fluid if allowed

Before you leave hospital, ask your doctor or nurse what to do when you go home. Find out:

- How long to wear your compression stockings
- Whether you must use any medicines
- What physical activity you need to do
- Whether you have to avoid alcohol
- What else you and your family can do to reduce the risk of a blood clot

What to watch for

If you experience any of the following while you are in hospital, call a nurse immediately:

- Pain or swelling in your legs
- Pain in your lungs or chest
- Difficulty breathing

If you have any of these signs after you have left hospital, telephone your doctor immediately or go straight to the Emergency Department (Ph: 364 0270). In the case of an emergency dial 111 for an ambulance

Acknowledgement:

Adapted from *Stop the Clot Programme*, National Institute of Clinical Studies, Australia, April 2009

For more information about:

- your health and medication, go to www.healthinfo.org.nz

