

## How do we treat thrombosis?

Venous thrombosis is treated with drugs called anticoagulants. Your doctor will advise the best anticoagulant for you. These drugs do not dissolve the clot but work by slowing the normal clotting mechanism. This allows your body to naturally break down the blood clot

### Activity

The pain caused by a DVT and PE usually reduces within a few days of beginning treatment, although it can take several weeks to improve. Pain, swelling and heaviness in your limb may be worse at the end of the day, or after standing or walking for long periods. It usually improves overnight or by elevating the limb when resting. In some instances it may be beneficial to obtain a Class II compression stocking. If you are concerned with ongoing symptoms in your leg your GP or thrombosis nurse can advise you. In general your symptoms should be getting better and not worse.

While you are taking anticoagulants you should be able to continue your usual activities. Increase your activities gradually. It is safe to exercise to a level you can comfortably tolerate, however if it becomes painful you should rest.

It is important to avoid contact sports or work related activities that carry an increased risk of injuring yourself.

## Will I get more thrombosis?

There is a risk of getting another thrombosis after stopping treatment. This depends to some extent on why you got the thrombosis in the first place. If your thrombosis was because of surgery, immobility or because you were wearing a plaster cast then you are unlikely to have another thrombosis outside of this context. If there was no obvious reason for your thrombosis or you have a strong family history of thrombosis the risk of having another one is higher. For these patients the doctor will discuss your risk at the end of your treatment period.

In most cases when you have a DVT/PE, you can be treated as an outpatient. This will involve taking regular medications and understanding your diagnosis and treatment to ensure we manage this condition together appropriately.

If you have any questions, please call the Thrombosis Nurse Specialist  
North Shore Hospital  
Phone 486 8920 Ext 3788 or 0212450522  
Waitakere Hospital  
Phone 486 8920 Ext 6806 or 0212435966



# Venous Thrombosis

*What you need to know*

## What are blood clots?

Blood normally flows freely around the body and clots at the site of an injury to stop bleeding. Sometimes blood can clot in the circulation and block the blood flow. The medical term for this is a **thrombosis**.

## Types of thrombosis

Blood is pumped around your body by your heart. Blood flowing away from your heart is carried in arteries and returns to the heart in the veins. A thrombosis can form in an artery or a vein. If it forms in an artery it may cause a heart attack or stroke. If it forms in a vein it may cause a deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or a pulmonary embolism (PE).

## What have I got?

Your problem is caused by a blood clot blocking the normal flow in one of your veins. Blood clots in veins do not usually cause a heart attack or stroke.

## Which veins are affected?

A thrombosis in the leg can affect the veins near the skin, and this is called a superficial vein thrombosis. A DVT forms in the deep veins inside the body; these veins cannot be seen.

DVT most commonly form in the deep veins of the leg, but can also form in the veins of the arms or other parts of the body such as the abdomen.

## Superficial vein thrombosis

A superficial vein thrombosis affects the veins just under the skin. These may cause local pain and tenderness with some heat and redness over the thrombosis site. They often affect people with varicose veins.

## DVT Deep Vein Thrombosis

A DVT may cause pain, swelling, redness and warmth in your limb, because the blood leaving your limb has difficulty getting through the veins. If you have a DVT it is possible for a piece of the thrombosis to break away, and this is called an embolus. The embolus travels to your lungs, where it is called a pulmonary embolism (PE). The possibility of this happening is less once treatment with anticoagulants has started.

## PE Pulmonary Embolism

If you have a PE, this means a clot has lodged in your lungs. PE can cause chest pain, shortness of breath and cough but not everyone has all these symptoms.

The shortness of breath is caused by obstruction to the blood flow in the lungs by the thrombosis. A Pulmonary Embolism can be dangerous and life threatening. It is important for you to notify your doctor as soon as possible if you notice difficulty in breathing, have chest pain or feel faint.

## Why did I get a thrombosis?

Often a definite cause for venous thrombosis cannot be identified, but a number of risk factors are known to contribute:

- After surgery, especially hip, knee, pelvic or abdominal surgery.
- After an injury, especially one needing immobilisation in a plaster cast or moonboot.
- In woman taking oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy.
- During and immediately after pregnancy.
- Cancer.
- Past history of DVT or PE.
- After a period of immobility such as prolonged bed rest.
- Some people have a lifelong inherited clotting tendency.
- Family history of DVT or PE.