

Deep Vein Thrombosis A Patients Guide

What is a deep vein thrombosis (DVT)?

A DVT is a blood clot that has developed in the deep veins of the body, most commonly in the legs. Leg symptoms can present as pain, swelling, and redness in the affected limb.

Why might DVT occur?

Sometimes a reason cannot be found, but the following have been identified as potential risk factors for developing a DVT:

- Previous thrombosis or family history.
- Pregnancy and 6 weeks after delivery.
- Recent surgery/Trauma.
- Contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy.
- Cancer.
- Over 60 years old.
- Reduced or impaired mobility.
- Being overweight.
- Certain blood clotting disorders.
- Smoking.
- Varicose veins.
- Nephrotic syndrome.
- Inflammatory bowel disease.

If you are concerned about what caused your DVT you should speak to your GP.

Why is a DVT treated?

- To help prevent the blood clot growing bigger and becoming unstable.
- To help reduce the risk of pulmonary embolism (PE).
- To help relieve the severe symptoms of DVT.
- To help prevent post thrombotic syndrome (PTS).

PE and PTS will be explained further in the leaflet

How is DVT treated?

Treatment is with anticoagulants (blood thinners). This will be fully explained to you by your nurse, pharmacist or doctor. Most are in tablet form but some are given by injection.

If you are prescribed injectable anticoagulation (Heparins) please advise your health professional if you have a latex allergy or have concerns about receiving a drug that is derived from animal origins.

If you are prescribed Apixaban or Rivaroxaban tablets, please advise your health care professional if you have a lactose intolerance

You will be given specific written information relating to your selected treatment. The anticoagulant drug you have been prescribed does not actually dissolve the clot, as that is naturally absorbed by the body over time. The drug prevents the clot becoming any bigger, and reduces the risk of it breaking off and travelling to the lungs. Other blood vessels take over temporarily and bypass the narrowed or damaged veins. It is very important that you do not miss any doses and ensure that you leave enough time to get further prescriptions from your GP.

What are the possible side effects of treatment?

If you take your medication as recommended, it is unlikely that you will experience any problems. However, all anticoagulants increase the risk of bleeding, so it is essential that if you experience any of the following, you must contact your GP immediately, or seek urgent medical advice by dialling either 111 or 999:

Black stools or blood in your stools

- Blood in your urine.
- Coughing or vomiting blood.
- Severe menstrual bleeding in women.
- Heavy or persistent nosebleeds.
- Severe unexplained bruising.

Are there any other possible complications?

A possible serious complication is a pulmonary embolism (PE). This is where part of the clot breaks off and travels to the lungs. Symptoms may include:

- Severe shortness of breath.
- A sharp pain in the chest which is worse when you breathe in.
- Coughing up blood.

If you experience any of the above, you must seek urgent medical help by dialling 999

How long do I need to take anticoagulant treatment?

This will be discussed with you before you leave the VTE clinic. The recommended duration is 6 weeks for a clot below the knee and 3 months if your clot is in the veins at the level of the knee or higher.

For clots located at the knee or above, long term treatment beyond 3 months is sometimes advised to reduce the chance of future DVT or PE. This decision is based on your specific circumstances and will be made by your GP, or at a hospital follow up visit. Long term treatment is usually not needed if there was a clear cause for your clot.

After you have completed the 6 weeks or 3 months treatment you should check with your doctor if it is time to stop if you are not sure.

Pain relief:

Appropriate pain relief, if required, will be discussed with you. Please avoid over the counter Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as Ibuprofen.

General advice:

- Other medication: Always check with your GP or pharmacist before taking any medication, including herbal or alternative treatments, to ensure they are safe to take with your anticoagulant.
- Please advise any health care professional that you are taking an anticoagulant, including your dentist.
- Please do not take Aspirin unless advised or prescribed by a health care Professional.
- Speak to your GP if you become pregnant or are planning a pregnancy, whilst taking anticoagulants.
- Seek urgent medical attention if you experience a significant blow to the head.
- Carry the alert card that is provided with your medication.

Exercise and rest:

You may find that your physical activity is limited due to your symptoms. It is advisable to avoid standing and sitting for long periods, and to take short walks if you are able. When sitting, ensure your legs are elevated on a stool, level with your hips or heart, or rest on your bed or sofa. This will help to relieve the swelling.

Travel:

You are able to continue to drive, if your symptoms allow, but ensure that you can perform an emergency stop. If you have any further queries regarding travel please consult your GP for advice

What to expect after a DVT

Your symptoms should improve in the first few weeks, however in some people symptoms may not disappear completely. If your symptoms remain troublesome a compression stocking may make the leg more comfortable.

Stockings are prescribed by your GP. If you have any circulation or skin problems you may not be able to have a stocking.

In approximately 1 in 4 persons with DVT the leg swelling or discomfort persist long term, despite treatment. This is called Post Thrombotic Syndrome (PTS). Compression stockings may help with these symptoms.

References and further information

www.nhs.uk

www.thrombosisuk.org

How to contact the Anticoagulant Nurse Specialists:

Tel: 01603 286286 –Direct dial to Switchboard, please ask them to contact us for you

Tel: 01603 287809-Direct dial to VTE clinic with an answerphone

**VTE clinic
Level 2 East block
Norfolk and Norwich Hospital
Colney Lane
Norwich
NR4 7UY**

