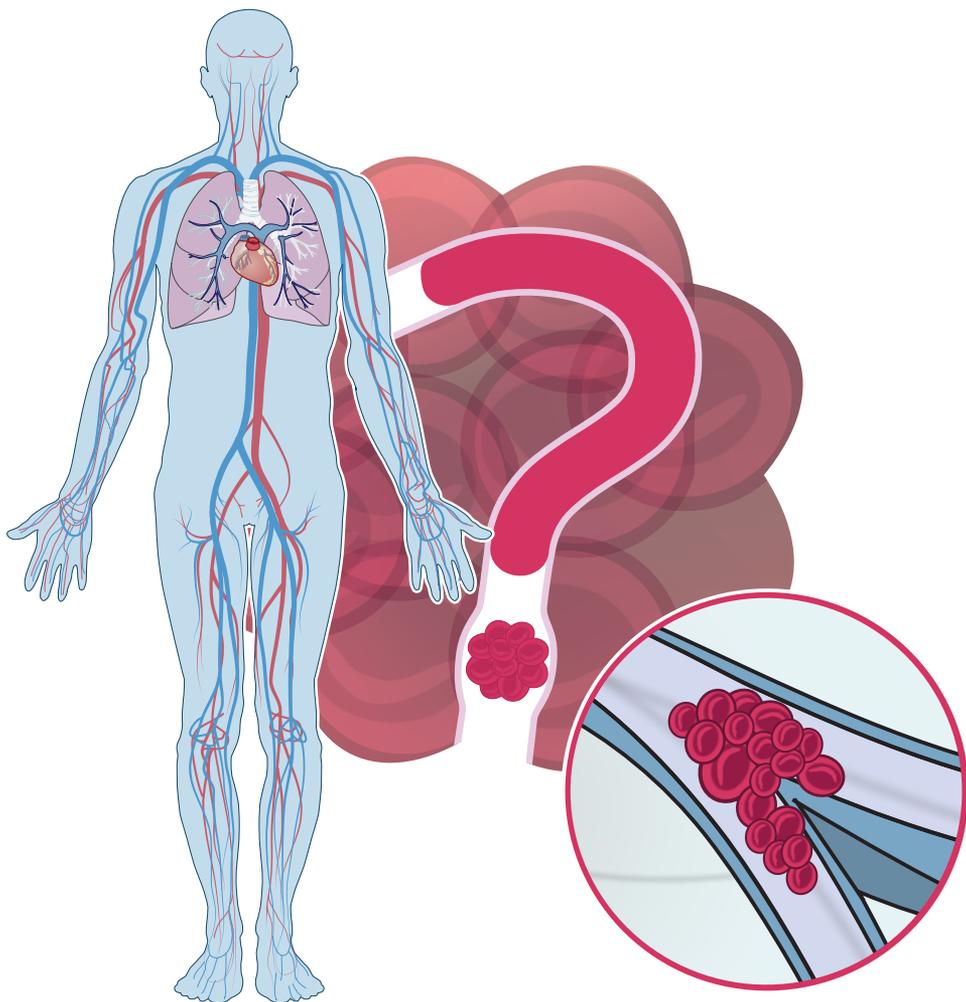


I Have a Blood Clot in my Vein: What I Should Know

A guide for patients and their families



Centre universitaire
de santé McGill



McGill University
Health Centre

Office d'éducation des patients
Patient Education Office

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IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ

Information provided by this booklet is for educational purposes. It is not intended to replace the advice or instruction of a professional healthcare practitioner or to substitute for medical care.

Contact a qualified healthcare practitioner if you have any questions concerning your care.



This material is also available through the MUHC Patient Education Office website www.muhcPatientEducation.ca

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Introduction

We are giving you this booklet because you have a **blood clot in your vein** or there is a chance you could get one.

This booklet has information about:

- What a blood clot is
- How blood clots can affect you
- What signs and symptoms to look for
- How to treat and prevent blood clots



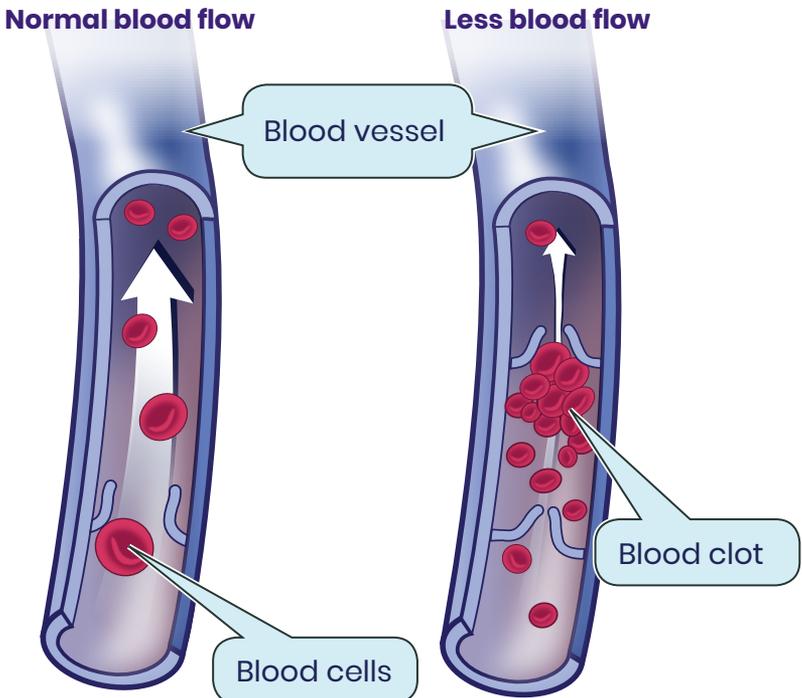
What is a Blood Clot?

A blood clot happens when blood gets thicker and becomes solid or mostly solid. Clotting can protect us from bleeding too much. This usually happens after an injury. For example, if we get a cut, clotting helps to stop the bleeding. This is normal and helps start the healing process.

But if blood forms a clot inside the bloodstream, this can be dangerous. If this happens, there is less blood flow or no blood flow to parts of your body.

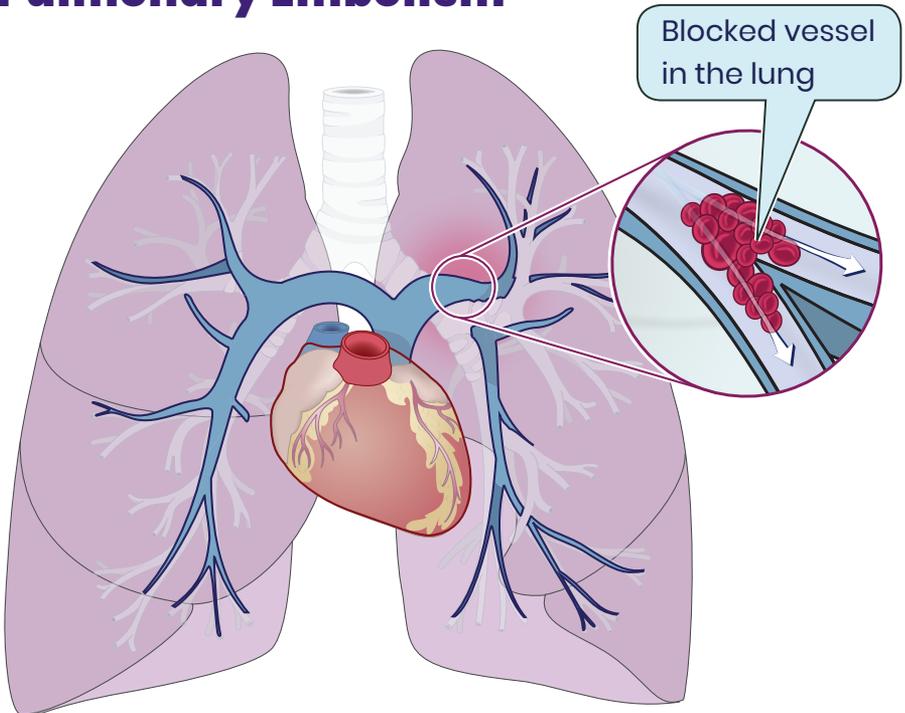
Blood clots that start in the bloodstream can form in arteries or veins. This booklet is about blood clots that start in the veins.

Thrombosis

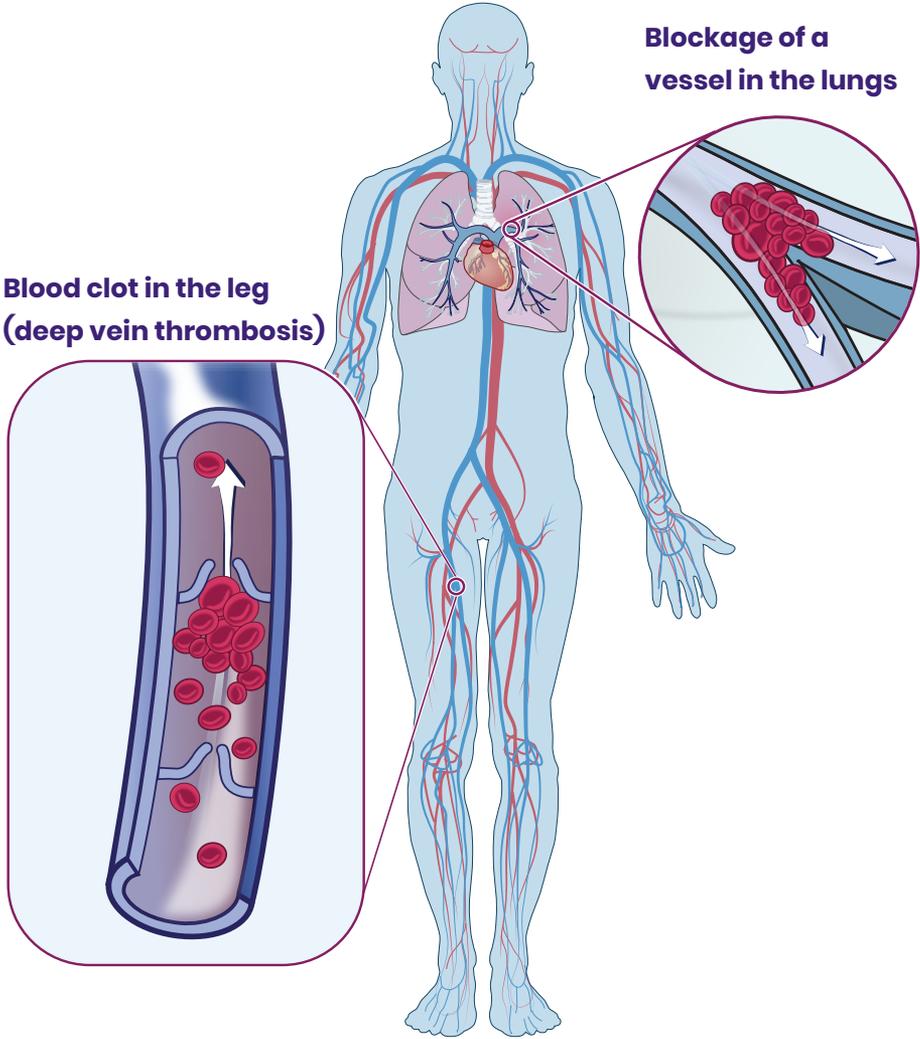


When a blood clot forms in the veins it is called **phlebitis or deep vein thrombosis (DVT)**. This type of blood clot happens most often in the large veins of the legs or arms. These clots sometimes move through the bloodstream, away from the vein where it started. This is called a **venous thromboembolic event (VTE)**. The symptoms of a VTE depend on where the blood clot stops in the bloodstream. If it travels to the lungs, it is called a **pulmonary embolism (PE)**. This is a serious condition.

Pulmonary Embolism



Pulmonary Embolism



What are the Signs and Symptoms of a Blood Clot?

Some people with a blood clot may not feel anything strange or different. Most people will feel some of the symptoms below.

Common symptoms of deep vein thrombosis (DVT):

Swelling



Pain



Warmth and redness



Common symptoms of pulmonary embolism (PE):



- Sharp chest pain that can increase when breathing



- Difficulty breathing
- Feeling light headed



- Feeling dizzy
- Fainting



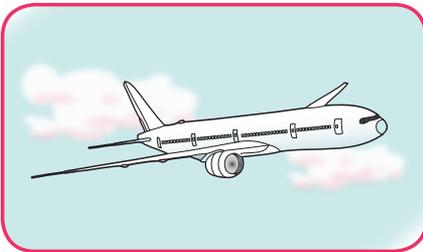
- Sweating more than usual
- Fast pulse (you feel like your heart is racing)
- Coughing up blood

What are the Risk Factors for Blood Clots?

A **risk factor** is something that increases your chances of getting a blood clot.

The main risk factors for DVT or PE are:

- Birth control pills
- Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT)
- Cancer and some cancer treatments
- Some diseases that make the blood thicker
- Some health conditions, like inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), lupus or other rheumatic diseases
- Long distance travel (sitting in a car or plane for more than 4 hours)
- Being pregnant or having been pregnant recently
- A recent stay in hospital, for an injury, surgery or illness
- Staying in a bed or a chair and not being able to move around easily



Did you know?

You can have a blood clot even if you have none of the risk factors listed.
(Please see signs and symptoms on Page 9.)

How are Blood Clots Treated?

If you need treatment for a blood clot, your doctor may prescribe **anticoagulants** for you. This type of medication thins your blood. Thinning your blood means clots do not form as quickly.

This may prevent other harmful blood clots from forming. It will keep the blood clot from getting bigger.

This also gives your body time to dissolve the clot slowly and safely.

There are different types of anticoagulants. Here are some examples:

Pills	Injections under the skin	Injections into a vein
Apixaban (Eliquis)	Dalteparin (Fragmin)	Heparin (only taken while you are in the hospital)
Dabigatran (Pradaxa)	Desirudin (Iprivask)	
Endoxaban (Lixiana)	Enoxaparin (Lovenox)	
Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)	Fondaparinux (Arixtra)	
Warfarin (Coumadin)	Heparin	
	Tinzaparin (Innohep)	

My doctor has prescribed:

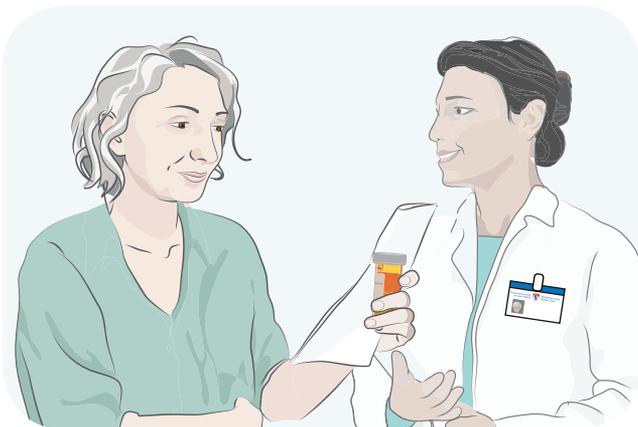
Most people with blood clots start treatment in the hospital or clinic, and continue at home. Treatment includes pills or injections under the skin.

These treatments take time to work. It can take a few days or a few weeks. Over time, your symptoms of blood clots should get better.

Our team members include doctors who specialize in blood clotting (**hematologists** and **internists**), family doctors, nurses, and pharmacists.

We will follow you to find out why you might have developed a blood clot. We will suggest how long you need to be treated. Depending on your situation, we may prescribe anticoagulants for a short time (3 months). We may also talk to you about taking anticoagulants for a longer period.

If you are prescribed **warfarin pills** (also called Coumadin), we will organize follow-up for your treatment. This includes blood tests. We may also change how much warfarin you take and how often you take it.



What are the Possible Side Effects of Treatment?

If you are taking anticoagulants, you may have some of the following side effects:

Nausea, indigestion
or diarrhea



Less strength
and energy



Mild bleeding

- Bleeding gums after brushing your teeth
- Small nosebleeds
- Bruising easily
- Bleeding after a small cut that stops after a few minutes



When to Get Emergency Medical Care

You should go to the nearest **Emergency Department** right away if you have:

- **Major bleeding that is not slowing down**
 - Red, dark-colored urine
 - Black, red or dark red stools
 - Bleeding from the gums or nose that does not stop after 10 minutes or after pressure is applied
 - Bright red or brown colored vomit
 - Coughing up reddish mucus
 - Unexplained bruises
 - More menstrual bleeding than normal



- Any injury to your head, belly or chest
- Pain, swelling or discomfort in the leg or arm where the blood clot is located
- Change in vision or loss of vision
- New symptoms of a DVT or PE (see **Signs and Symptoms** on page 9)



Difficulty breathing, swelling, or rash

Tips to lessen the chance of bleeding:

- Do not take aspirin or drugs containing aspirin like: ASA, Excedrin[®], and Alka-Seltzer[®] products unless directed by your doctor.
- Do not take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like: Naproxen (Aleve[®], Anaprox[®], Naprelan[®], Naprosyn[®], Midol[®]), celecoxib (Celebrex[®]) and Ibuprofen (Motrin[®], Advil[®]) unless directed by your doctor.
- Other over-the-counter pain medications, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol[®]), may be a safer choice.
- Use a soft bristle toothbrush
- Shave with an electric razor instead of a blade
- Be careful when using scissors or knives
- Avoid activities that have a bigger chance of injury (for example: contact or high impact sports)

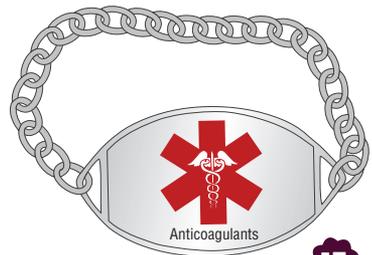


Tell your health care provider if you take supplements or herbal remedies.

They can change the way other medications work. This can cause serious side effects like bleeding.

Wear an alert tag. People who take anticoagulants should wear a bracelet, necklace, or other alert tag all the time.

If you need medical treatment and are too sick to talk, the tag will let people know that you take anticoagulants and that you may bleed a lot. To receive a tag, phone: 1-800-668-1507.



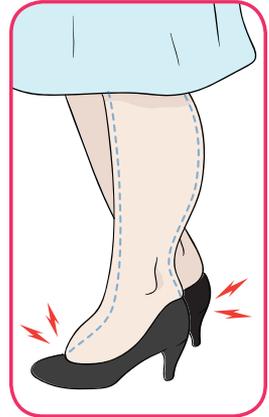
What are the possible complications of a DVT?

Up to half of people with a deep vein thrombosis develop a condition called **post-thrombotic syndrome**.

Post-thrombotic syndrome can be mild. In these cases, it may not affect your daily activities. But it can also be serious and disabling.

Symptoms in the affected leg can include:

- Swelling that lasts a long time
- Constant pain, pressure, heaviness, tightness or leg tiredness
- Skin hardening, dryness, or itching
- Darkening skin, spider veins
- In severe cases, ulcers (skin breakdown)



Your doctor may prescribe **elastic compression stockings** for you. These special stockings help improve the flow of blood in the veins of your legs. They also lessen swelling in the foot and leg.

You will need a prescription to get elastic compression stockings. Also, the swelling in your legs must go down before you can use them.

Post-thrombotic syndrome can also happen in the arm if you have an arm clot, but it does not happen often and is less painful.

What are the Possible Complications of Pulmonary Embolism?

A very small number of patients with a pulmonary embolism (2 to 4 out of 100 people), can develop a complication called **pulmonary hypertension**.

This happens when the pressure in the artery of the lung increases. It puts a strain on the right side of your heart.

Symptoms of pulmonary hypertension include:

- Shortness of breath that does not go away or gets worse, especially with exercise
- Feeling very tired (fatigue)
- Chest pain
- Almost fainting or fainting



If you still do not feel well 3 months after having a pulmonary embolism, you should meet with your doctor. They will examine you and make sure you do not have pulmonary hypertension.

I have a blood clot in my vein.

What to do:

In the hospital

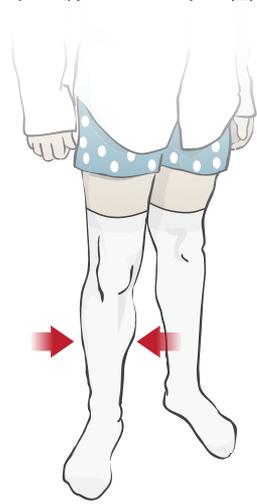
If you are admitted to the hospital, your medical team will look at the chances you have of getting a clot. They can recommend things that can prevent a clot from starting.

We may suggest:

- Sequential compression devices
- Elastic compression stockings
- Medications

You can also help prevent clots by:

- Moving around and walking often.
- Getting out of bed for your meals
- Doing your leg and deep breathing exercises



Staying active is important to keep you well. It can also help prevent pneumonia, bedsores, constipation and muscle weakness.

In daily life

Here are some things you can do every day to help prevent clots and complications:

- Stay active
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Quit smoking or smoke less
- Limit how much alcohol you drink.
- Take your anticoagulant medication
- Know your risk factors and family history



While traveling

When you travel long distances (more than 4 hours), you have more chances of getting blood clots.



Here is what you can do to lessen your chances:

- Stand up and walk around every 1 to 2 hours
- Change your position and move your legs and feet often
- Stretch your legs (flex and point your toes up and down to improve blood flow)
- Wear loose, comfortable clothes
- Drink fluids
- Wear compression stockings if they have been prescribed for you



