



Preventing Blood Clots When You Get Home: Common Questions

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What is a venous thromboembolism (VTE)?

Venous thromboembolism (VTE) is a condition in which blood clots form in a vein. While these can happen in different locations in the body, the most common place is in the veins of the legs. This is called a deep-vein thrombosis (DVT). If a piece of a clot breaks off, which is then called an embolus, it can get lodged (stuck) in the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism (PE).

Are these clots serious?

VTE kills about 100,000 patients every year. This is more people killed by motor vehicle accidents, AIDS, and breast cancer combined. There can also be other long-term problems such as getting another clot in the legs or lungs, leg swelling that will not go away, or sores that will not heal.

Who is at risk of getting a VTE?

Risk factors for VTE include:

- Age 40 years or older
- Recent hospitalization
- Not moving around as much as usual
- Having a blood clotting disorder
- Smoking
- Obesity/overweight
- Having had a prior VTE event
- Pregnancy
- Heart failure, respiratory disease, infectious disease, cancer, stroke, irritable bowel syndrome, or rheumatic diseases.

How do I know if I have one?

Patients with a DVT can have no symptoms, so the clot is there, and you never know it. Symptoms that may occur include redness, swelling, and/or pain in one leg.

Patients with a PE can also have no symptoms. Symptoms that may occur include chest pain, shortness of breath, rapid breathing or heart rate, and coughing up blood.

How can I prevent VTE?

One method to prevent a VTE is to try to keep walking around as much as you used to before going to the hospital. Because you probably will not feel 100% once you get home, this is not always possible. Your doctor may prescribe a blood thinner or anticoagulant medicine to help prevent a VTE.

Currently, rivaroxaban (Xarelto) is the only available FDA approved medicine for long-term prevention of VTE.

What is a blood thinner?

A blood thinner is a medicine that helps stop blood clots from forming or getting bigger. Blood thinners help blood flow more smoothly through veins and arteries.

What are the risks of taking blood thinners?

For all blood thinners, the main risk is bleeding. You should watch for blood in your urine and stool, as well as excessive bleeding after brushing and flossing your teeth. Other signs of bleeding may be excessive bruising, nose bleeds that will not stop, or cuts that do not stop bleeding. If any of these occur, be sure to contact your doctor as soon as possible.

How long will I need to take a blood thinner?

Your doctor will tell you how long you will need to take it after leaving the hospital. Most VTE events that occur in patients after leaving the hospital occur in the first 30 days after they go home.

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