

# Lowering Your Chance of Getting a Blood Clot While in the Hospital

# **Lowering Your Chance of Getting a Blood Clot While in the Hospital**

## **What are blood clots and why do they happen?**

- Blood normally clots (thickens) to stop a wound from bleeding. If a clot forms in your body, it can get in the way of normal blood movement. This is similar to a rock blocking the flow of water in a stream.
- Blood clots are common. They can happen to anyone, but they are more common in people who:
  - › Are sick
  - › Are admitted to the hospital
  - › Who need to have surgery

**Blood clots can cause serious harm and may even cause death.**

## Deep vein thrombosis

- Blood clots that happen in deep veins are called **deep vein thrombosis** (“throm-boh-sis”) **or DVT**. The clot may get big enough to block the blood flow to an arm or a leg.

## Pulmonary embolism

- A blood clot can break off from a DVT and travel to the lungs. A travelling blood clot is called an embolus (“em-buh-luhs”).
- A clot that travels into the lungs is a serious condition called a **pulmonary embolism** (“pull-mun-ary em-buh-liz-um”) **or PE**. The clot can get stuck in the arteries of the lung, blocking blood flow to lung tissue.

**What are your questions?**

**Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.**

## What will my health care team do to help prevent me from getting a blood clot?

- We will check you for risk factors for blood clots.
- We may give you a medication called an anticoagulant (“an-tee-ko-ag-u-lant”) to thin your blood. This medication is given by injection or by mouth.
- We will ask you to get out of bed and walk as much as you can. **This is important to prevent blood clots, and for your overall recovery.** We will help you get up and walk if you cannot do this by yourself.
- We may give you compression stockings (often called “TEDS”) to wear on your legs. These are special stockings that help blood flow in your legs.
- If you are having surgery, we may give you a sequential compression device (SCD) to wear. This is a sleeve with air tubes that are wrapped around the leg. Air is pumped into different parts of the sleeve to help blood flow.

## How can I tell if I might have a blood clot?

- You cannot always tell if someone has a blood clot, but sometimes there are warning signs.
- **It is important to tell a member of your health care team right away if you have any of these warning signs:**
  - › Your leg or arm swells up and hurts.
  - › Your leg or arm feels warmer than usual and is red.
  - › Your chest suddenly start to hurt.
  - › You feel like your heart is beating faster. (increase in heart rate)
  - › You have trouble breathing or suddenly start breathing faster.
  - › You cough up blood.

## What can I do to help lower my chance of getting a blood clot?

- Learn the signs of a possible blood clot on page 4, and check for them regularly.
- Ask a member of your health care team, “What is being done to lower my chance of getting a blood clot?”
- Take the anticoagulant (blood thinner) medication you were given.
- Move your legs often and walk as soon as your health care team says it is safe to do so.
- Wear your compression stockings (“TEDS”), if you have been asked to do so.
- Ask your nurse how much liquid you should drink each day. If you have just had surgery, you may be getting liquids through your intravenous (I.V.).

## Going home

- There is a chance that you could still get a blood clot after you go home from the hospital.
- If you have **any** of the warning signs on page 4, **call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.**

# Notes:

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This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:  
[www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources](http://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources)

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:  
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

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