Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) and Pulmonary Embolism (PE)
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This pamphlet will help you learn about deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism. You must be able to recognize certain symptoms so you can seek medical care right away.

What is a deep vein thrombosis (DVT)?
Blood normally flows quickly through your veins, and does not usually clot. A DVT is a blood clot that forms in a deep vein in the leg or arm. The clot may get big enough to block the flow of blood in that limb.

What is a pulmonary embolism (PE)?
A PE happens when one or more blood clots suddenly break off and travel to your lung. The clot(s) can get stuck in an artery in your lung, blocking blood flow to the lung tissue. This is usually prevented by taking anticoagulation medications (“blood thinners”).
Are DVTs and PEs dangerous?
Yes. A blood clot may block blood flow and affect the circulation of blood in your leg or arm. Part of the clot may break off and travel to your lung. This could be life-threatening.

What are the symptoms of a DVT?
› pain and swelling in the leg or arm
› the pain may be sharp and sudden, like a muscle cramp
› the pain may come on over time and get worse with movement (such as walking or bending your arm)
› swelling caused by less blood flow
› the leg or arm may become red
› the area may be tender and/or warm to the touch
Sometimes there are no symptoms, and a DVT is only diagnosed if there is a complication.

What are the symptoms of a PE?
› sudden shortness of breath
› sharp, knife-like pain in the chest or back when you breathe in
› coughing up blood
It can be hard to diagnose a PE because the symptoms may be the same as other conditions.

If you have any symptoms of a PE, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

Why do blood clots form?
A DVT can happen for no apparent reason. You may be at a higher risk of developing a blood clot if you:

› have recently had surgery or trauma.
› are immobile (not able to move). Blood flows slower in someone who is immobile, which makes it more likely to clot. Immobility may be due to a long surgery, illness or injury, or a cast on a limb.
› have an inherited condition that causes your blood to clot more easily.
› are taking certain medications, such as birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy.
› have damage to the inside lining of a vein from an injury or an earlier DVT.
› are pregnant.
› are overweight.
› are older.
› have a serious illness such as cancer.
How are DVTs and PEs treated?

• Most people who have a DVT/PE can be treated as outpatients (without staying overnight in the hospital). Your doctor will decide what treatment is best for you.

• You may be given blood-thinning medication (e.g., Eliquis®, Xarelto®, Pradaxa®, warfarin, or Fragmin®).

• If the DVT is in your leg, raise the affected leg when sitting.

• It is best to stay active during your recovery. Stop and rest if you have pain or discomfort in your leg or are short of breath.

• If you need medication for discomfort or pain, take acetaminophen products such as Tylenol®.

• **Do not take ASA products** (such as Aspirin®) or ibuprofen (such as Advil® or Motrin®) **when you are taking blood thinners.**
How can I lower my risk of another DVT or PE?

• **Exercise** – get your legs moving to keep blood circulation.

• **Keep a healthy weight** – weighing less puts less pressure on your legs.

• **Avoid long periods of sitting or standing** – change your position often to help with blood flow. If you are taking a long flight, get up and walk around, if possible.

• **Think about your clothing** – do not wear tight clothing around your calves or groins, as it makes good circulation harder.

If you ever have any of the same symptoms that you had with this DVT/PE, call your doctor, or go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.
Notes:

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Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit https://811.novascotia.ca
Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit http://ns.211.ca

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.