



Patient & Family Guide
2020

Preventing Blood Clots While in the Hospital

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*Prévenir la formation de caillots de sang
lors d'une hospitalisation* (FF85-1545)



www.nshealth.ca

Preventing Blood Clots While in the Hospital

This pamphlet explains:

1. What blood clots are and why they happen.
2. What your health care team will do to help prevent a blood clot from happening to you.
3. How you can tell if you might have a blood clot.
4. What you can do to help prevent a blood clot.

What are blood clots and why do they happen?

Blood clots are common. Blood normally clots (thickens) to stop a wound from bleeding. If a clot forms inside your body, it can get in the way of normal blood movement, like a rock blocking the flow of water in a stream.

Blood clots can cause serious harm to the body and may even cause death. Blood clots can happen to anyone. They are most common in people who are sick, people who need to be in the hospital, or people who need to have surgery.

Deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolisms

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

Blood clots 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 **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 your lung tissue.

What are your questions?

Please ask. We are here to help you.

What will my health care team do to help prevent me from getting a DVT or PE?

We are committed to your safety. Here are a few things we will do to help stop a blood clot from happening to you:

- We will check you for risk factors for blood clots.
- We may give you anticoagulants (“an-tee-ko-ag-u-lants”). This is blood-thinning medication given by injection or by mouth to prevent blood clots.
- We will ask you to get out of bed to walk as much as possible. **This is important in preventing 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 which can help prevent blood clots.
- 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 and thigh. Air is pumped into different parts of the sleeve to help blood flow, and this may help prevent blood clots.

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

We can't always tell if someone has a blood clot, but sometimes there are warning signs. It is important for you to tell a nurse or doctor if you notice any of these warning signs:

- › Your leg or arm swells up and hurts
- › Your leg or arm feels warmer than usual and you notice redness in that area of the limb
- › Your chest suddenly starts hurting
- › You feel like your heart is beating faster (increase in heart rate)
- › You have trouble breathing or suddenly start breathing faster
- › You start coughing up blood

What can I do to help prevent myself from getting a blood clot?

- Review the signs of a possible blood clot on page 4, and check for them regularly.
- Ask your doctor or nurse, “What is being done to lower my chance of getting a blood clot?”
- Take the anticoagulant or “blood-thinning” medication if given to you. This will lower the chance of abnormal blood clotting in your veins.
- Wear your compression stockings (“TEDS”), if you have been asked to do so.
- Drink plenty of fluids, but check with your nurse first to make sure that this is right for you. If you have just had surgery, you may be getting fluids through your intravenous (IV). Ask your nurse to see how much fluid you can drink.
- Move your legs often and walk as soon as your health care team says it is safe to do so.

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 listed on page 4, call 811 or go to the nearest Emergency Department.

