



York and Scarborough  
Teaching Hospitals  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Preventing Blood Clots (Venous Thromboembolism) When You Are In Hospital

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① For more information, please contact:

The York Hospital: 01904 631313

Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

or

Scarborough Hospital: 01723 368111

Woodlands Drive, Scarborough, YO12 6QL

and request the department or ward where you have  
been receiving treatment



<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Why have I been given this information? .....	4
What is Venous Thromboembolism (VTE)? .....	4
Is VTE common? .....	6
Who is at risk of VTE? .....	6
What will happen when I come into hospital? .....	7
What can I do to reduce my risk of VTE? .....	8
What will happen in hospital to reduce my risk of VTE? .....	9
What are the possible side effects from treatment? .....	12
Is there anything I should do when I leave hospital? .....	12
When should I seek urgent medical advice? .....	13
Tell us what you think of this leaflet .....	15
Teaching, training and research .....	15
Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) .....	15

## **Why have I been given this information?**

The following information has been written to explain the treatment you should be given to help prevent blood clots when you are admitted to hospital. It also tells you about the symptoms you might have if you develop a blood clot in one of your legs or lungs.

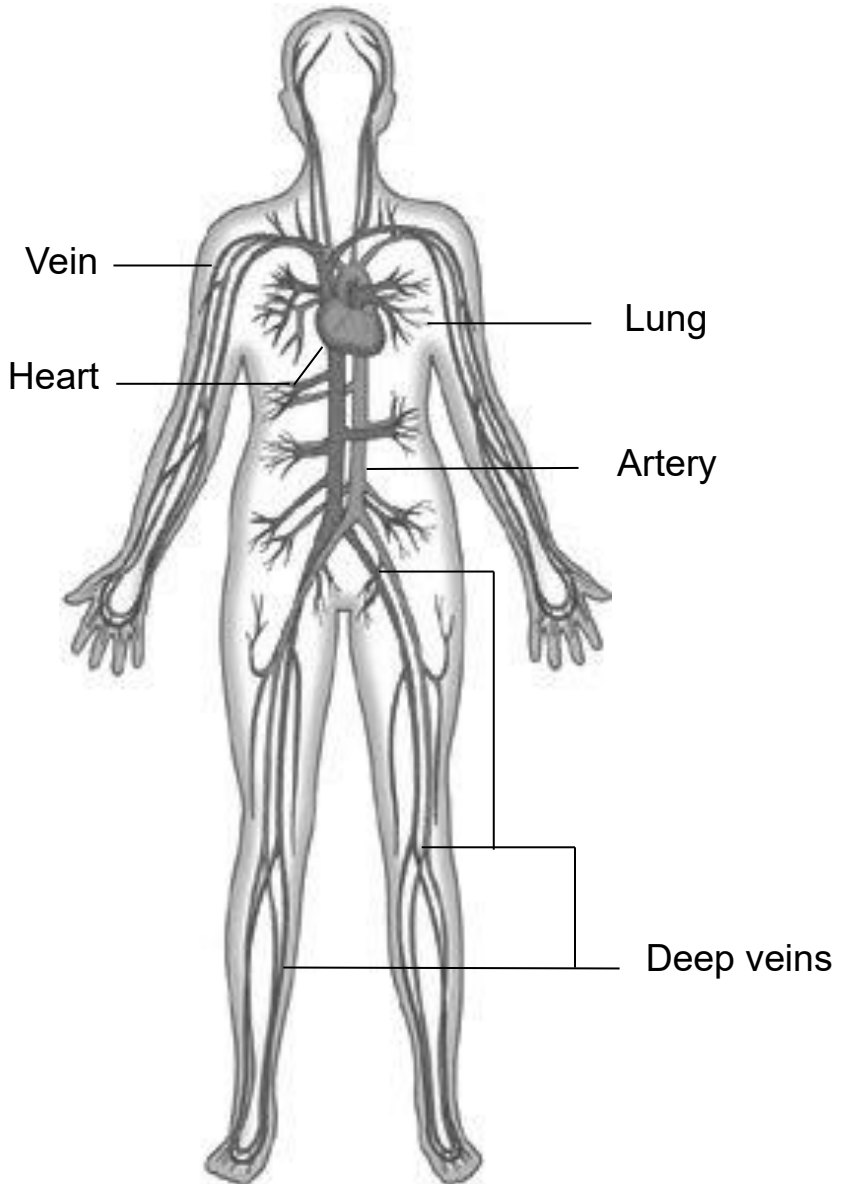
After reading this information, you may wish to talk to your doctor about the treatment that is most suitable for you.

## **What is Venous Thromboembolism (VTE)?**

VTE is the name given to a blood clot that forms in the deep veins that run through your body. The most common place for a blood clot to form is in the veins in one of your legs. This is called a deep vein thrombosis or DVT for short. A DVT usually causes pain and swelling of the affected leg.

If a blood clot becomes dislodged, passes through your circulation and reaches your lungs, this is called a pulmonary embolism or PE for short. A PE can cause chest pain, breathlessness and coughing (sometimes with blood stained phlegm).

A DVT or PE requires urgent treatment. If you develop any of the symptoms of DVT or PE either in hospital or soon after leaving hospital, you should get medical help immediately.



Deep veins in your body are at risk of developing blood clots

## **Is VTE common?**

Many people believe that going on a long aeroplane flight is the biggest risk of getting a blood clot in your leg. You are actually much more likely to get a blood clot if you are admitted to hospital because of illness or for an operation.

## **Who is at risk of VTE?**

If more than one of the following applies to you, your risk of getting a blood clot when you come into hospital is usually increased:

- You are over 60 years old
- You are pregnant or have recently had a baby
- You are less mobile than when you are at home
- You have cancer
- You or a close relative have had a blood clot before
- You have another medical condition requiring regular treatment
- You are overweight
- You smoke
- You have had recent episodes of diarrhoea and/or vomiting (dehydration)
- You are taking a contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy (50% increased risk)
- You are having an operation, especially on your stomach, hip or knee
- You are very ill

# What will happen when I come into hospital?

The Department of Health recognises VTE is an important problem in hospitals and has advised doctors and nurses that everyone being admitted to hospital should have a VTE risk assessment.

The doctors or nurses looking after you will assess your risk of getting a VTE. If you are at risk, your doctor or nurse will decide what preventative treatment will be most suitable for you. Preventative treatment reduces the risk of you developing blood clots whilst you are in hospital.



# What can I do to reduce my risk of VTE?

If your hospital admission has been planned several weeks in advance, there are some precautions that you can take to reduce your risk of VTE:

- Keep a healthy weight
- Keep moving or walking; leg exercises are valuable
- Drink plenty of fluid to keep hydrated
- Stop smoking
- If you have to make long journeys that are longer than three hours in the month just before your operation try to walk around or do leg exercises during the journey
- Talk to your doctor or nurse if you take a contraceptive pill or hormone replacement tablets (HRT).

Your doctor may ask you to stop taking them for four weeks before your operation.

If you are worried about the risk of unplanned pregnancy if you stop your contraceptive pill, or if you think the symptoms associated with stopping HRT may be too unpleasant, then you should discuss this with the nurse or doctor in hospital. If you decide to continue your contraceptive pill or HRT then you should be given VTE prophylaxis during your hospital admission and possibly at discharge depending on the type of surgery you have received.



# **What will happen in hospital to reduce my risk of VTE?**

The type of treatment you are offered to reduce the risk of a VTE will depend on why you are in hospital and what treatment is most suitable for you. Your doctor will usually prescribe one of the following:

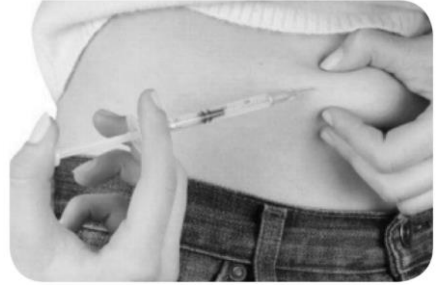
- Injections
- Anticoagulant medicines
- Stockings
- Inflatable leg or foot pumps

To be effective, these methods of reducing risk must be given or used correctly. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your doctor for advice.

Details of these treatments are provided on the following pages.

## Injections

You may be prescribed an anticoagulant injection, which reduces the chance of your blood clotting and causing a DVT or PE.



The injection normally prescribed is called low molecular weight heparin (LMWH). This is usually injected once a day into the skin over your stomach or into the top of your leg. You may experience a temporary stinging sensation when the injection is given. This is normal and you are advised not to rub the area around the injection site.

## Anticoagulant Medicines

There are some newer medicines available that can be taken by mouth. These medicines may be prescribed for you instead of the injections. Like the injection, the tablets reduce the chance of your blood clotting and causing a DVT or PE. Unfortunately, these medicines are not suitable for all patients and your doctor will have to decide if this is the best treatment for you.

Some medicines are of animal origin; if you have any dietary restrictions that forbid certain animal products within your diet you may wish to discuss this with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

## **Stockings**

You may be asked to wear anti-embolism stockings. You will be measured and fitted with knee or thigh length stockings depending on your leg measurements. You should be shown how to wear the stockings and advised to tell the nurse or doctor if you have any new symptoms in your feet or legs when wearing them, for example reddening of your skin or pins and needles in your feet.



## **Inflatable Leg Pumps / Foot Pumps**

If you have had an operation, you may be asked to wear a special inflatable sleeve or cuff around your legs or feet while you are in bed. The pumps will inflate automatically applying gentle pressure at regular intervals and helps to increase the blood flow out of your legs. Improving the blood flow out of your legs helps to reduce the chances of developing a blood clot.

## **What are the possible side effects from treatment?**

If you take the medication as prescribed, it is unlikely that you will experience any significant problems. LMWH or anticoagulant medicines will increase your risk of bleeding. Tell the doctor or nurse looking after you if you experience any of the following:

- Blood in your bowel motions or urine
- Coughing or vomiting blood
- Heavy or persistent nose bleeds
- Unexplained visible bruising

## **Is there anything I should do when I leave hospital?**

If you have been sent home with stockings, injections or tablets to reduce the risk of developing a DVT or PE, you should continue with these as directed by the doctors looking after you. If you have not had any advice or information about continuing treatment, check with the doctors or nurses who have been looking after you in the hospital or your GP.

# When should I seek urgent medical advice?

If you experience the following:

- **Unusual swelling and pain in your leg(s)**

Contact your GP or attend A&E as soon as possible. Tell the doctor that you have had a recent admission to hospital.

If you experience any of the following possible symptoms of PE:

- **Unusual sudden onset of breathlessness or chest pain**
- **Coughing up blood**
- **Any episode of collapse**
- **Fast heart rate, racing pulse or palpitations**

**Call 999 urgently** (or 112 if you are using a mobile phone). Tell the operator that you have had a recent admission to hospital.



# **References and further information**

The Department of Health: [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk)

NHS 111: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

## **Tell us what you think of this leaflet**

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Pharmacist, York Hospital Pharmacy Department,  
The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or  
telephone 01904 725736.

## **Teaching, training and research**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email [pals@york.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:

[www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/](http://www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/)

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