

If you have questions about VTE, talk to your doctor, pharmacist, nurse, or health care provider.

Preventing Harmful Blood Clots While in the Hospital

Venous thromboembolism (VTE) is a very harmful type of blood clot that forms in a vein. The blood clot can partially or totally block blood flow. This can cause serious illness and may be life-threatening.

There are 2 types of VTE blood clots:

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

A DVT occurs when a blood clot forms in the deep veins, most often in the arms or legs. A DVT can cause limb swelling, skin breakdown, and pain, among other complications.

Pulmonary Embolism (PE)

A PE occurs when a DVT breaks off and becomes lodged in the lungs. A PE can be a life-threatening emergency.

A VTE blood clot is a serious, but preventable condition for patients in the hospital. You may be at risk of getting a VTE blood clot while you are in the hospital because of the following factors:

- **Inactivity:** Too much time in bed can lead to poor blood flow. Poor blood flow can cause a blood clot.
- **Surgery:** If you had surgery, you may be at risk of getting a VTE blood clot.
- **Personal history of VTE:** If you have had a previous VTE blood clot, you are at risk of another blood clot.
- **Other factors** may also increase the risk of forming a VTE blood clot:
 - Obesity (being overweight)
 - Cancer
 - VTE blood clots in family members
 - Smoking
 - Chronic health problems

Preventing VTE in the Hospital

There are 3 important ways you can help to reduce the risk of VTE blood clots while you are in the hospital. Your doctor will decide if 1, 2, or all 3 of the following VTE blood clot prevention methods are right for you.

1. Activity:

- Stay as active as you can.
- As allowed, walk in the halls at least 3 times a day.
- Sit in a chair instead of bed at mealtimes.
- Nursing staff can assist you as needed.

2. Sequential compression devices (SCDs):

- SCDs are sleeves that wrap around your calves and gently squeeze your legs to keep blood moving. Some patients say SCDs feels like a leg massage!
- It is important to remember that these devices are only helpful when:
 - The pump is **turned on** while you are wearing the SCDs on your legs.
 - SCDs are worn **at all times** when you are in bed **and** when you are in a chair.
- Nursing staff can assist you as needed.

3. Blood-thinning medications:

- This medicine helps to prevent blood clots from forming.
- It is most often given as an injection with a small needle under your skin.
- Allow nurses to give you the blood-thinning injection ordered by the doctor. Don't skip any doses since this can increase your risk of blood clots. Some common blood-thinning medications given by injection are heparin and enoxaparin (Lovenox®).

Skipped doses of a blood thinner may lead to a VTE blood clot, so it is very important to take it, even if you are walking and using SCDs.

Commonly Asked Questions

If I am up and walking, do I still need the blood thinning medicines and the SCDs?

Yes. It is still important for you to take the blood thinning medication as ordered by your doctor. Using a blood-thinning drug is the best way to prevent VTE. You should continue to use the SCDs when you are in bed or in a chair.

The nurse told me that my doctor prescribed a blood-thinning medication that must be taken 3 times a day. Do I really need all three doses every day?

Yes. Some blood thinning medicines prevent VTE blood clots only when you take them more than once a day. Your doctor has chosen the medication that is best for you. Allow the nurse to give you the blood thinning medicine as ordered by your doctor. You can ask your doctor if a once-a-day medication is right for you.

For additional information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.

Para asistencia en español, por favor llamar al Departamento de Representantes para Pacientes al 312.926.3112.

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