Preventing Harmful Blood Clots While in the Hospital

Venous thromboembolism (VTE) is a 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 physician 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 feel 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 physician.
     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®).

   *Skiped 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 physician. Using a blood-thinning medicine 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 physician prescribed a blood-thinning medication that must be taken 3 times a day. Do I really need all 3 doses every day?**

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