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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute healthcare or medical advice.  
If you have any questions, please ask your healthcare provider.

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years.
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) and Pulmonary Embolism (PE)

We have written this pamphlet to help you learn about deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism. You must be able to recognize certain symptoms so you can seek immediate medical care.

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

What is a pulmonary embolism (PE)?
A pulmonary embolism occurs when one or more blood clot(s) suddenly breaks off and travels to the lung. The clot can become lodged in the arteries of a lung blocking the blood flow to lung tissue. This is usually prevented if you are taking anticoagulation medications.

Are DVT and PE dangerous?
Yes. A clot may obstruct blood flow and interfere with the circulation of the leg or arm. A portion of the clot may break off and travel to the lung. This could be life threatening. Your doctor has examined you and found...
What are the symptoms of a DVT?
The main symptoms are pain and swelling in the leg or arm.
• The pain may be sharp and sudden, like a muscle cramp.
• Sometimes the pain may come on gradually, and increase with movement such as walking or bending your arm.
• Decreased blood flow can cause swelling.
• The calf 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 a complication occurs.

The most common symptoms of a PE are:
• Sudden shortness of breath.
• Sharp, knife-like pain in the chest or back when you take a breath.
• Coughing up blood.
It may be hard to diagnose a PE because the symptoms may be the same as other conditions.

Why do blood clots form?
A DVT can occur for no apparent reason.
The following may place you at a higher risk of developing a blood clot:
• The blood flows slower in the veins of a person who is inactive. This makes it more likely to clot than blood flowing at a normal rate. Inactivity may be due to a long operation, illness or injury, or a cast on a limb.
• Inherited conditions can cause the blood to clot more easily.
• Certain medications such as birth-control pills or hormone replacement therapy.
• Damage to the inside lining of the vein, from an injury or an earlier DVT.
• Pregnant women, people who are overweight or older, and those with a serious illness such as cancer have a higher risk of DVT.

How are DVTs and PEs treated?
Most people who have a DVT/PE can be treated without being admitted to the hospital. Your doctor will decide if this is best way to treat you.
• If you have a DVT in the leg, elevate the affected leg(s)
your condition stable. He/she has decided to treat your DVT/PE as an out-patient.

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The most common symptoms of a PE are:
  • Sudden shortness of breath.
  • Sharp, knife-like pain in the chest or back when you take a breath.
  • Coughing up blood.

It may 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 immediately.

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Tips to reduce your risk of another DVT and PE:

• Exercise
  Get your legs moving to encourage blood circulation in your legs.

• Control your weight.
The pressure on your legs will be less if you weigh less.

• Avoid long periods of sitting or standing
  Change your position often to promote blood flow.
  Elevate your legs above the level of your heart to improve circulation.
  Do not cross your legs when sitting.

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.

• Some people will be treated with only injections of a medication called Fragmin.

• Most people will be treated with injections of Fragmin and will also be started on an anticoagulant pill called Warfarin Sodium. You will take them together at first.

• If you need medication for pain or discomfort in your leg, please 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 Warfarin.

Do not take ASA products or ibuprofen when you are taking Warfarin.
• Watch what you wear.
  Do not wear tight clothes around your calves or groin as they restrict circulation.

If you have any of the same symptoms in the future that you have with this clot, call your family doctor, or go to your nearest Emergency Department immediately.
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