

Title: Blood clots causing you trouble?

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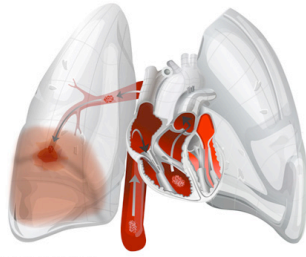
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Abstract:

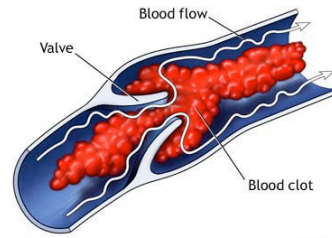
This is a patient education tool for Deep Venous Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism that summarizes definitions, risk factors, symptoms, diagnosis and treatment.

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Blood clots causing you trouble?



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Pulmonary Embolism (PE)

A pulmonary embolism is a blood clot that can block the blood vessels in the lung. The clot often gets to the lung from veins in another part of the body like the legs, pelvis or sometimes the arms.

Deep Venous Thrombosis (DVT)

A deep venous thrombosis is a blood clot that forms in the deep veins within your legs, pelvis or sometimes the arms. It causes problems by blocking the circulation of blood in that region.

What problems can these cause?

PE can cause sudden onset of

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest pain that is worse with breathing
- Fever
- Fainting
- Coughing up blood

DVT most often form in the legs. They can cause

- Pain
- Swelling
- Redness
- Warmth

in one or both legs over just hours to days.

Why worry?

Although many PE are not serious, they do cause about 200,000 deaths in the United States each year.

Aside from the trouble they give your legs, DVT can break off and travel to your lung causing a PE.

What causes blood clots to form?

Clots form in blood vessels to stop bleeding when you get cut. Sometimes though they can form inside your body when blood vessels get damaged on the inside or when the blood inside them is moving very slowly. This can happen

- during a long car or plane ride
- after surgery
- during or after pregnancy
- after injury or fracture
- while using birth control pills or estrogen
- if it runs in your family
- if you are born with a clot forming disorder
- if it has happened before, there is more chance that it could happen again

What tests will the doctor do?

- CT Angiogram – The doctor can do a 3D x-ray of the blood vessels in the lungs to see if a clot has formed within them. To do this, some material called “contrast” has to be injected into the blood right before the x-ray is taken.
- Ultrasound – The doctor can do an ultrasound of the legs to look for clots. This test uses sound waves to detect changes in the blood flow in the vessels of the legs.
- Blood test – The doctor can do a blood test called D-dimer to test if a blood clot has formed in the body.
- The doctor may do other tests if the ones above are negative or not available.

What can be done about it?

Blood clots are removed from the body by using blood thinners. There are two kinds of blood thinners, heparin and coumadin. Heparin is injected and coumadin is taken as a pill. The first few days after a PE or DVT, heparin is used to thin the blood. Coumadin is also started soon after and continued for at least three months. If a reason is found for the blood clots e.g. recent surgery, coumadin can be stopped after 3 months. However, if no reason is found or if the PE or DVT occurs a second time, coumadin may need to be continued for many years or for life.