

UW Medicine



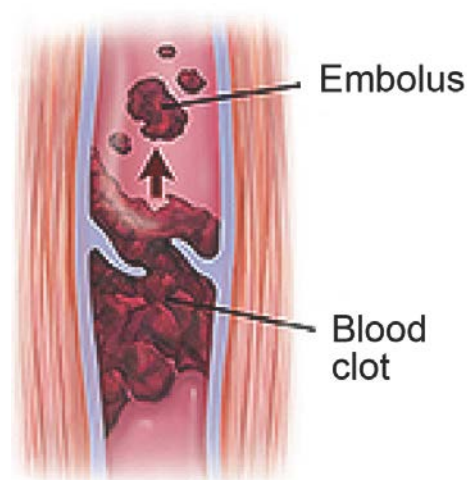
Treating Blood Clots

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE) and how they are treated

This handout explains blood clots, their symptoms, and how they are treated.

What is a blood clot?

A blood clot is a thickened mass of blood that has changed from liquid to semi-solid. Clots are needed in a healthy body to stop bleeding, such as at the site of a cut. But clots can be dangerous if they form inside blood vessels or organs.



What is a deep vein thrombosis?

A *deep vein thrombosis (DVT)* is a blood clot that forms inside a vein. Most DVTs form in leg veins, either above or below the knee, but they can also occur in other areas.

If a blood clot inside a vein breaks apart, a piece of the clot (an embolus) can travel to other parts of the body.

If DVTs are not treated right away, the clots can break apart and travel to other parts of the body. A piece of blood clot that travels to another part of the body is called an *embolus*.

What causes a DVT?

DVTs can occur:

- After surgery or an injury
- When you are inactive for a long time, like being in the hospital or in bed while you are ill
- After long trips in a car or plane

Your risk of getting a DVT is higher if you have certain diseases or are taking certain medicines that increase the risk of blood clotting. But, DVTs sometimes occur without a clear cause.

What are the signs of a DVT?

The most common signs of a DVT are:

- Swelling in the affected leg (or arm)
- Pain or tenderness in the affected leg (or arm)
- Redness or color changes in the affected leg (or arm)

What is a pulmonary embolism?

Clots that form in veins can travel to other parts of the body, including the lungs. A blood clot in the lungs is called a *pulmonary embolism* (PE). Sometimes a PE occurs with no clear cause.

A PE can be life-threatening because it cuts off the blood supply to the lungs. It must be treated right away.

What are the signs of a PE?

The most common signs of a PE are:

- Chest pain
- Rapid heart beat
- Shortness of breath
- Cough

How are blood clots treated?

Blood clots are treated with blood-thinning medicines (*anticoagulants*). Depending on the medicine your provider prescribes, you may receive it:

- As an intravenous infusion. These medicines include:
 - Heparin
 - Bivalirudin
- As an under-the-skin injection given once or twice a day. These medicines include:
 - Heparin
 - Enoxaparin (Lovenox)
 - Dalteparin (Fragmin)
 - Fondaparinux (Arixtra)
- As a pill or liquid, taken by mouth once or twice a day. These medicines include:
 - Warfarin (Coumadin)
 - Apixaban (Eliquis)

- Edoxaban (Savaysa)
- Dabigatran (Pradaxa)
- Rivaroxaban (Xarelto)

The medicine your provider prescribes depends on:

- What caused your blood clot
- Other diseases and health problems you have
- Your body weight
- Your kidney function
- Other medicines you take
- Costs and your insurance coverage

Your provider and pharmacist will work with you to choose the best medicine for you.

How long will treatment last?

Most blood clots are treated for 3 months. But, some people need to take their medicine for longer than 3 months. Some people may need to take blood-thinning medicine for the rest of their lives. Your doctor and pharmacist will decide the best treatment for you based on your needs.

Do blood-thinning medicines cause side effects?

Bleeding is the most common side effect of taking anticoagulants. Some blood-thinning medicines require special monitoring and dose changes to avoid bleeding. You will receive more information about the medicines that you are taking.

When to Call

Call your provider or your Anticoagulation Clinic, or come to the hospital emergency department **right away** if you:

- Have a serious fall
- Hit your head
- Have any of these signs of **bleeding**:
 - Red or dark brown urine
 - Red or black, tarry stool
 - Vomiting or coughing up blood
 - Severe headache or stomachache
 - A lot of bruising, or bruises that occur without a cause

- Very large bruises at the injection sites (if you are taking a medicine that is injected)
- Nosebleeds that happen often, bleeding gums, or unusual bleeding
- Any bleeding that will not stop or is very heavy
- Have any of these signs of **clotting**:
 - New pain, swelling, redness, or heat in your arm, leg, or foot
 - New shortness of breath, chest pain, or rapid heartbeat
 - New cough, including coughing up blood

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., call your Anticoagulation Clinic:

- UW Medical Center: 206.598.4874
- Harborview Medical Center: 206.744.2976
- Seattle Cancer Care Alliance: 206.288.6756

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the Anticoagulation Clinic pharmacist on call to be paged.