

## Haematology Department

# Advice for patients who have had a provoked DVT or PE

### What is a DVT?

A deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot that has formed in a deep vein, usually in the leg. It commonly starts in calf veins, but can extend up into the thigh veins. It can also occur in deep veins elsewhere in the body. Deep veins are the larger veins that run through your muscles (not the veins you can see below the surface of the skin) and carry blood towards the heart.

### What is a PE?

A pulmonary embolism (PE) is a blood clot that has become stuck in the lung arteries. This usually happens when a blood clot moves through the larger veins, through the heart and then becomes stuck in the lung arteries.

### Why did I have a DVT or PE?

You have been diagnosed with a provoked DVT/PE. 'Provoked' means there is a reason that led to your blood clot developing. Clots related to surgery are called provoked blood clots. Other common reasons for developing a DVT/PE are:

- Pregnancy
- Immobility
  - Lack of movement causes the flow of blood in the veins to slow down, increasing the risk of a blood clot forming.
- Going into hospital



## Patient Information

- A stay in hospital increases the risk of a DVT/PE. A surgical operation can increase the risk also.
- Cancer
  - Cancer and its treatments can increase the risk of blood clots. Cancer patients may also have 'sticky blood' and be less mobile.
- Oral contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
  - The combined oral contraceptive pill and HRT that contain oestrogen can increase the risk of a DVT/PE.

### **What is the treatment for a DVT or PE?**

The most common treatment for a DVT or PE is a medicine called an anticoagulant for three months only. This is usually with a tablet such as Apixaban or Rivaroxaban or may also be with an injection called Enoxaparin (the safest option if you are pregnant). Depending on your circumstances we may also use Warfarin, Edoxaban or Dabigatran tablets to treat your DVT/PE.

Anticoagulants work by interrupting the process involved in the formation of blood clots. This means you are less likely to develop further blood clots.

Anticoagulants can sometimes have a side effect of making you bleed more easily. Therefore, take extra care when shaving, cleaning your teeth if you have sensitive gums and when using sharp tools. It is important that you understand that if you hit your head (and are confused, have a headache or have changes in personality – signs of bleeding inside your head) you should attend A&E immediately. If you develop dark/black liquid stools (a sign of bleeding in the gut/intestines) you should attend A&E immediately.

For you we have decided that the benefit of taking the anticoagulant outweighs the risk of bleeding.

It is very important that you remember to take your anticoagulant regularly and as prescribed. If you have questions about your medication and before you start any new medication you can check the patient information leaflet

## Patient Information

that came with it, speak to your GP, a pharmacist or contact the anticoagulation nurses.

### **What happens after my treatment is finished?**

Once you have taken your three months of anticoagulation medication your treatment is finished. If your blood clot was related to an operation or surgical procedure then you will not have any further appointments.

We do not rescan the site of the original clot as a second scan does not change the treatment plan. If you have symptoms of a new blood clot then we will review you as per your first clot.

If you had a PE then you will have a review in the pulmonary vascular disease (PVD) clinic to check your lung function.

### **How can I reduce the risk of a future DVT or PE?**

- Avoid long periods of immobility (for example sitting in a chair for several hours)
- Get up and walk around regularly if you are sitting for long periods
- Take regular exercise
- Drink plenty of water
- When going on long trips on planes or trains or in the car; get up and walk around regularly and do calf exercises when sitting
- Keep to a healthy weight

Your GP/practice nurse can advise you further regarding healthy weight and exercise.

### **What signs should I look out for if I think I have another DVT or PE?**

Signs of a DVT:

- Pain and tenderness in the calf, sometimes with heat and swelling, sometimes with skin discolouration.

Signs of a PE:

## Patient Information

- Shortness of breath, chest pain which can be worse on breathing in and sudden collapse. You may also have the symptoms of a DVT.

If you have these signs you should go to A&E.

### **What is Post Thrombotic Syndrome (PTS)?**

PTS is a collection of symptoms that can occur after a DVT/PE. They can indicate that there has been some long term damage to the veins in your legs. The symptoms occur because increased pressure on your vein walls can damage the valves in your veins that keep the blood flowing up the leg. PTS can develop up to two years after your DVT/PE. Signs of PTS include:

- Redness, discolouration or hardness of the skin of your leg
- Aching or cramping in your leg
- Itching, tingling or pins and needles in your leg
- Swelling in your leg that may go up and down
- Easy to see veins close to the surface of the skin (varicose veins)
- Venous ulcers

These signs can be similar to that of a new DVT so please contact the anticoagulation clinic if you have any concerns.

Treatment options that may help include: sitting with the leg raised; wearing grade-2 compression stockings; taking regular exercise, losing weight, taking pain killers and caring for the wound regularly if you have a venous ulcer.

There are no medicines that have been shown to be of benefit in treating PTS other than using painkillers to help ease the pain.

## Patient Information

### Frequently asked questions:

*“I’ve noticed my periods are much heavier since starting my anticoagulant; what should I do?”*

- Please contact the anticoagulant clinic where one of the nurses will be able to advise you.

*“I want to go on holiday and it involves a flight; can I do this?”*

- If your DVT/PE was less than 2 weeks ago please contact the anticoagulation clinic for advice.
- If your DVT/PE was over 2 weeks ago and you are taking your anticoagulant as prescribed then you are at very low risk of developing a further DVT/PE and can fly.

*“What precautions should I take when travelling long haul?”*

- Walk around regularly – at least every 2-3 hours.
- Choose an aisle seat if you can
- Perform calf muscle exercises often
- Wear clothing that is loose and comfortable
- Do not use tranquilisers or sleeping tablets
- Stay hydrated (drink 250mL every 2 hours) and minimise alcohol consumption

*“Do I need to be treated differently if I have an operation or medical procedure in the future?”*

- If you had a DVT/PE after surgery on this occasion then we may make recommendations for you to have additional preventative medication in the future. Please contact the anticoagulation clinic for advice if you are having another procedure.

*“Do I need to do anything if I become pregnant in the future?”*

- Please ensure you tell your midwife that you have had a DVT/PE and they will ensure you are assessed for risk of DVT/PE during your pregnancy.

## Patient Information

Anticoagulation clinic nurses can be contacted on 02476 965533.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact Anticoagulation clinic nurses can be contacted on 02476 965533 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

### **Document History**

Department: Haematology  
Contact: Alice Burrige #5323  
Updated: December 2020  
Review: December 2022  
Version: 1  
Reference: HIC/LFT/2513/20