

Blood Clots and Cancer: Know the Risks

LEARN • ASK • PREVENT

LEARN!

Patients with cancer are at risk for developing blood clots. This condition is called **deep vein thrombosis**, or **DVT**. DVT occurs when a blood clot forms in a large vein. These clots usually develop in the lower leg, thigh or pelvis. Occasionally, portions of the blood clot can break off and migrate through the circulatory system to the lungs, a condition called **pulmonary embolism**, or **PE**. PE may be life threatening.

Patients with Cancer

- Are at an even higher risk for DVT/PE if hospitalized for surgery or acute illness or are receiving chemotherapy treatments.
- May develop DVT in unusual areas, such as in the abdomen or around a catheter (for example, central catheters, ports, or PICC lines).
- Have a higher risk of bleeding while taking blood thinning medication for DVT/PE.

Prevention is key.

What are the symptoms and signs of DVT/PE?

Often DVT/PE are silent and go undetected, but typical symptoms include:

Symptoms for DVT can include:

- Recent swelling of a limb (arm or leg)
- Unexplained limb pain or tenderness (arm or leg)
- Skin that is warm to the touch
- Skin redness

Symptoms for PE can include:

- Recent or sudden shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood
- Sudden collapse
- Feeling of apprehension



PREVENT!

Although DVT/PE can occur with little or no warning, your risk of DVT/PE can be reduced by recognizing the signs and symptoms and taking the appropriate preventive care.

You can work to actively manage your risk factors and help prevent DVT/PE by:

- Talking with your doctor about reducing your risk of developing DVT/PE.
- Checking with your hospital to see if they offer preventive measures for patients at risk of developing DVT/PE, such as compression stockings, external compression devices, and anticoagulant therapy.
- Remaining active as tolerated, even when mobility is restricted.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle: Talk to your doctor about how you can incorporate healthy choices into your everyday life.
- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Stop smoking.

Risk factors that can elevate the risk of DVT/PE include:

- Cancer and cancer treatments
- Extended bed rest or immobility
- Recent surgery or procedures
- Insertion of a central venous line or PICC line
- Serious injury
- Personal or family history of DVT/PE or a clotting disorder
- Increasing age
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Inflammatory diseases
- Pregnancy
- Hormone contraceptive or replacement therapy
- Varicose veins

Know your risk factors!

ASK!

Ask your healthcare provider about:

- Your risks of DVT/PE during or after any hospitalization or surgery for your cancer.
- Your type of cancer, the treatment plan, and how that might affect your risk for DVT/PE.
- How your personal or family history of blood clots affects your risk for DVT/PE.
- Your prescription and over-the-counter medications, including herbal preparations.
- Practices in place at the hospital, including the use of preventive blood thinning medication or compression devices, that are recommended to help reduce your risk of DVT/PE while you are hospitalized.
- Receiving preventive measures for DVT/PE even after you leave the hospital to go home, or during your outpatient cancer treatment.

For more information on DVT/PE, visit www.ThisIsSerious.org.

Additional Resources:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dvt/facts.html>

<http://htc.medicine.duke.edu/>



DukeMedicine

