

Venous thromboembolism (blood clots) following foot and ankle surgery



Information for patients

Department of Podiatric Surgery



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The aim of this leaflet is to provide an overview of the risks of developing blood clots following foot and ankle surgery. These blood clots can present as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), or less frequently, pulmonary embolism (PE).

What is a Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot in one of the deep veins in the body. Blood clots that develop in a vein are also known as venous thrombosis. DVT usually occurs in a deep leg vein, a larger vein that runs through the muscles of the calf and the thigh. It can cause pain and swelling in the leg and may lead to complications such as pulmonary embolism.

What is a Pulmonary Embolism (PE)?

A pulmonary embolism is a blood clot in the pulmonary artery, which is the blood vessel that transports blood from the heart to the lungs. It is a serious and potentially life-threatening condition as it can prevent the blood from reaching your lungs. When the blood leaves the heart it is low in oxygen and needs to reach the lungs to pick up oxygen. A severe PE can cause the lungs to collapse and can have the potential to be fatal.

DVT and PE together are known as venous thromboembolism (VTE).

What are the signs / symptoms of DVT and PE?

- Swelling to the back of the calf muscle
- Constant pain
- Redness, particularly at the back of your leg, below the knee
- A DVT usually (but not always) affects one leg. In some cases, there may be no signs or symptoms.
- Symptoms of a Pulmonary Embolism include new onset breathlessness, chest pain and in severe cases, collapse.

Both DVT and PE require urgent medical attention

Does surgery increase the risk of DVT?

- Surgery to the foot or ankle which involves a period of immobility increases the risk of DVT formation.
- The risk of developing a blood clot is reduced with surgery involving local anaesthetic, as opposed to general anaesthetic.
- Your risk status will be assessed at your pre-operative assessment based upon the following factors:
 - Above 60 years of age
 - Obesity
 - Inflamed varicose veins
 - On hormone replacement therapy
 - Oestrogen containing contraception
 - Certain cancer medication
 - Certain medical conditions
 - Certain blood disorders
 - Continuous travel of 4 hours or more within 1 month either side of surgery

Can the risk of developing a DVT be reduced?

If your assessment shows that you are at an increased risk of developing a DVT, measures will be taken to reduce your risk. These may include:

- Foot movement exercises
- Early mobilisation
- Hydration
- Anti-embolism stockings to be worn continuously for 2 weeks following surgery
- A course of injections to reduce the blood's ability to form clots

Who should I contact if I have concerns or questions?

Should you wish to discuss any of the information in this leaflet prior to your surgery, please do not hesitate to contact us on:

- **0114 271 4668**

If you suspect that you have developed a Deep Vein Thrombosis or Pulmonary Embolism after your operation, you should contact us as a matter of urgency on:

- **0114 271 4668** (office hours)
- **07623 891 113** (out of hours)

If you are unable to contact us, we advise that you seek urgent medical attention from your GP or Accident and Emergency Department.

Alternative formats can be available on request.

Please email: sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net

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