

# WARNING

Is a hospital blood clot  
waiting to strike?



Hospital-Acquired Blood Clots

How to help prevent them  
A patient and carers' guide

[www.stoptheclot.com](http://www.stoptheclot.com)

Don't be a  
blood clot victim

# WARNING

A blood clot while staying in hospital is a very real danger

## So what are blood clots?

Our body naturally allows blood to clot to prevent serious blood loss (due to an injury for example).<sup>1</sup> However, blood should only clot outside the blood vessels because clotting within a blood vessel can be very dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

A blood clot often occurs first in a leg and symptoms can include swelling, pain, tenderness and redness.<sup>1</sup> A blood clot in the lung can cause breathlessness, chest pain and even lead to collapse and death.<sup>1</sup>

You should talk to your ward doctor or nurse straight away if you have any of these symptoms. If you think you could be at risk of a blood clot, raise this issue next time you talk to the ward doctor or nurse.

## This booklet

This booklet has been developed to raise awareness of the very real threat of a blood clot while staying in hospital. Staying in hospital or being admitted to hospital significantly increases the risk of a dangerous blood clot. Just check out the facts opposite that most people are unaware of!

It is also important to remember that going into hospital does not cause blood clots, but things like immobility while in hospital can. Also, fortunately, blood clots in hospital can be easily **prevented** and this will be explained later in the booklet.

## Some alarming facts

- Up to **32,000** people die every year in the UK due to a preventable blood clot in hospital<sup>2</sup>
- Approximately one person dies in **every** typical UK hospital every other day due to a preventable blood clot<sup>3</sup>
- Preventable blood clots in UK hospitals cause **more deaths per year than MRSA, AIDS, breast cancer and road traffic accidents combined**<sup>2,4-7</sup>

## Is this booklet for me?

Yes, it's very likely that this booklet is for you. That's because most of us know someone who is either currently staying in hospital or is about to do so.

Anyone staying in hospital is at risk of a dangerous and preventable blood clot so please read on.



The information here could save your life, or the life of someone you know. Don't be a blood clot victim, stop the clot now!



## So how are blood clots in hospital prevented?

Fortunately, this is usually quite straightforward.

If you are staying in hospital for an extended period of time **ask the ward doctor or nurse for a simple, painless blood-clot risk assessment.**

If you are the carer, relative or friend of someone you know who is staying in hospital **ask the ward doctor or nurse for a blood-clot risk assessment** on behalf of the patient.

Firstly, as recommended recently by new Government Guidelines: **Everyone** staying in hospital should receive a blood-clot risk assessment. This is simple and painless and consists of a checklist that the ward doctor or hospital nurse runs through with you... for example they may ask you about your age... your medical history... any procedures or operations you have had while in hospital and so on.

Secondly, if this blood-clot risk assessment shows that you are at any risk of a dangerous blood clot, actions to reduce the chance of a blood clot forming will be taken (this is known as thromboprophylaxis). There are a number of approaches available in hospital to help prevent a blood clot forming and your ward doctor or nurse is the best person to talk to about this.

Unfortunately, few people are aware of the danger a blood clot in hospital can pose. And very few people realise that they should be assessed for this danger when staying in hospital. Do not be afraid to talk to the ward doctor or nurse if you – or someone you know – are staying in hospital and you are unsure if you have received a blood-clot risk assessment. Remember, not everyone who needs assessment receives assessment, so it's a good idea to ask. We all talk about MRSA, but a blood clot in hospital is a more common cause of death.<sup>2,6,8</sup>

### WARNING

It is a new Government recommendation that **every patient in hospital receives a blood-clot risk assessment**<sup>2</sup>



## What should I do next?

### 1. Assess the risk

Answer this simple question: are you or someone you know about to go into hospital or already staying in hospital?

If you answer YES, then there is potentially a risk of developing a blood clot.

Knowing what to tell a loved one, relative or friend who is going into hospital for an extended period of time might not only help reduce their risk of developing a hospital-acquired blood clot, it might save their life.

### 2. Talk to someone

If you or someone you know is at risk of a blood clot in hospital you need to act now.

Talk to the ward doctor or nurse about a blood-clot risk assessment. As stated earlier, this should be done as soon as possible when you enter the hospital AND 48-72 hours (2-3 days) later. Your ward doctor or nurse will always have your best interests at heart, so remember, they may already have done a blood-clot risk assessment without you realising it. If they haven't yet done one, they may, like many healthcare professionals not yet be fully aware of this new Government recommendation. So it's always good to check – it's better to receive a risk assessment sooner rather than later!

It is also important to remember that while your GP may be able to provide general medical advice and help, this is a **hospital** matter that should be discussed with the **ward doctor or nurse.**

## So, who is at risk of a blood clot?

### Factors that increase the risk of a blood clot<sup>1</sup>

#### MEDICAL & GENETIC CONDITIONS

Serious illnesses like cancer, heart failure or pneumonia increase the risk of blood clots and inherited conditions like Factor V Leiden thrombophilia cause abnormal blood clotting. These conditions and others, may be associated with extended periods of staying in hospital – for this reason, the risk of developing a **preventable** hospital-acquired blood clot may be higher in people with these conditions in hospital

#### IMMOBILITY

Being less mobile for an extended period of time (e.g. sitting or lying in bed)

#### LIFESTYLE

Smoking, obesity and an overly sedentary lifestyle can also increase the risk of blood clots

#### AGE

Patients over 40 are at greater risk of developing blood clots

#### SOME MEDICATIONS

Chemotherapy (cancer treatment), the combined contraceptive pill and Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) are all known to increase the blood-clot risk

#### PREGNANCY

It has been estimated that 1 in 1,000 pregnant women develop blood clots in the calf or thigh (Deep Vein Thrombosis)

#### PREVIOUS BLOOD CLOTS

If you have had a blood clot previously you are at risk of developing another one



## Help a loved one – a reminder

The following tear-out cards may help you to remember the important information contained in this booklet which may be relevant to you or a loved one now or in the future. Simply tear out along the dotted line and keep in your wallet or purse.

### Your reminder

#### WARNING

Anyone staying in hospital is at risk of a potentially fatal blood clot

- A blood clot while staying in hospital (e.g. due to immobility) is a very real and recognised risk
- A blood clot in hospital kills more people every year than MRSA, AIDS, breast cancer and road traffic accidents combined
- A blood clot in hospital is **PREVENTABLE** (see overleaf)

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### Help a loved one

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Visit [www.stoptheclot.com](http://www.stoptheclot.com) where you will find valuable information to send by e-mail to a loved one, relative or friend about how they can help reduce the risk of developing a hospital-acquired blood clot.

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## Your reminder

### HELP

#### Please assess my risk of a blood clot if I am unable to ask for one myself

- It is a Government recommendation that EVERYONE in hospital receives a blood-clot risk assessment
- This is a simple, painless, checklist which asks about your age and medical history
- Preventative treatment (thromboprophylaxis) is available for those at risk



**I don't want to be a blood clot victim.**

Keep this card safe. It could help you or a loved one in the near future

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References: 1. NHS Direct. 2. House of Commons Health Committee. In: *The prevention of venous thromboembolism in hospitalised patients*, HC 99, The Stationery Office Limited, London, England, 2005. 3. Data on file – sanofi-aventis. NPR 09/1070. 4. Cancer Research UK Mortality CancerStats 2004. Breast. Cancer Factsheet – February 2004 [www.cancerresearchuk.org]. 5. Department of Transport, National Statistics, Road Casualties Great Britain, 24 June 2004 [www.dft.gov.uk]. 6. Health Statistics Quarterly, Spring 2005, National Statistics, 24 February 2005. 7. Health Protection Agency et al. AIDS/HIV Quarterly Surveillance Tables. No 65:04/04, January 2005. 8. Cohen AT et al. *Lancet* 2008; **371**: 387-394.

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