



Deep Venous Thrombosis (DVT)/Pulmonary Embolism (PE)

Although relatively uncommon, blood clots can occur after surgery, especially following surgery of the lower extremities. Blood clots can occur in leg veins after trauma or surgery when the blood gets too thick and/or doesn't move fast enough. Simple procedures and those involving shorter operative times carry less risk than complex procedures and those involving longer operative times. When a blood clot occurs in a vein, it is called a Deep Venous Thrombosis (DVT). Sometimes a DVT can separate from the vein wall and travel to the lung, which is called a Pulmonary Embolism (PE). Pulmonary Embolism can be very dangerous and carries significant health risks including sudden death.

While the risk of symptomatic DVT after knee arthroscopy is low, every patient who undergoes surgery is at some risk. The risk is somewhat higher after more extensive lower extremity surgery including Knee/Hip replacements, ACL/Knee ligament reconstruction, and lower extremity fracture surgery. Other risk factors for DVT and PE include: Smoking, Prolonged Immobility, Hormone Replacement Therapy, Birth Control Medications, Cancer, Blood Clotting Disorders (such as Factor V Leiden and Protein C or S deficiencies), and/or a Personal or Family History of prior DVT or PE. It is important that you notify us as well as your Primary Care Physician if you or a family member has had a prior DVT or PE or if you have any of the risk factors noted above.

Signs and symptoms of DVT include swelling and/or pain in the leg, calf, foot or behind the knee. Signs and symptoms of a PE include shortness of breath, chest pain, difficulty breathing, and/or a rapid heart rate. If you are concerned about a DVT, it is essential that you get in touch with your physician immediately. If you have symptoms consistent with a possible PE, you should notify your physician and go to the emergency room immediately for evaluation and treatment. Blood tends to clot when it is stationary (no movement), thick (poor fluid intake), and with surgery or trauma (blood vessel lining damage and/or inflammation).

The following activities can help to minimize your risk of DVT/PE after surgery:

Frequent Movement

Move all 4 extremities (especially your legs) several times per hour (both when awake and while resting in bed). Get up during the day to walk short distances around your home every 3-4 hours if possible. The above activities keep blood moving and are especially important during the first 2 weeks following surgery. Excessive narcotic intake can cause side effects including lethargy and excessive drowsiness which can decrease mobility. Take narcotics as needed to limit severe pain, but don't take more than is necessary.

Adequate Hydration (Drink Plenty of Water)

Drinking water thins the blood making it less likely to clot. It also encourages mobilization as you will need to make more frequent trips to the restroom.

Smoking cessation

Smoking is a known risk factor for DVT and PE. Complete cessation of smoking for at least 1 month prior to surgery and at least 1 month after surgery will help to decrease your risk of DVT/PE as well as to optimize soft tissue/bone healing and recovery. If you are going to go through the effort of smoking cessation prior to surgery, you might as well simply quit smoking altogether. This is so important that we recommend that you strongly consider delaying your surgery until you are able to successfully quit smoking (at least during the above time frames).

Blood thinners

If you do not have significant risk factors for DVT and PE, we recommend taking an enteric-coated Aspirin 81 mg once a day for 10-14 days following lower extremity surgery. If you have a number of risk factors, a blood clotting disorder, or if you have a personal or family history of DVT or PE, inform us before your surgery. In certain situations a stronger prescription blood thinner and/or an extended duration of treatment may be necessary.

Please contact us if you have questions or would like additional information.