Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

Pulmonary embolism (PE)

This leaflet explains about pulmonary embolism (PE) and how to treat it. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the nurse or doctor caring for you.

What is a PE?

A PE is a blockage of blood vessels in the lung. It can be a potentially serious or life-threatening condition.

What causes a PE?

It usually happens when a blood clot forms in one of the deep blood vessels (deep vein thrombosis), usually in the leg or pelvis, and travels to the lung. Sometimes a reason cannot be found as to why the blood clot has formed, but associated risk factors for blood clots include:

- previous blood clots or a family history of blood clots
- pregnancy
- oral contraceptive pill
- surgery or immobility
- long haul flights (and other travel if more than four hours in duration)
- smoking
- being overweight
- increasing age
- cancer
- an underlying condition of 'sticky blood'.

How is a PE treated?

If you have a PE, your doctor will prescribe you an anticoagulant, which is a medicine that prevents the blood from clotting as quickly as normal. The anticoagulant will stop the blood clot getting any larger. This may help the symptoms of shortness of breath and/or chest pain but will not get rid of the blood clot completely.

When do I need to seek further advice?

You should seek further advice if you develop any new symptoms, such as:

- chest pain or breathlessness
- coughing or vomiting blood
- any excess bruising or bleeding.

showing we care

What do I need to do after I go home?

- Exercise and rest: You may find that your physical activity is limited due to your symptoms. You should avoid prolonged periods of exercise in the first few weeks, and ensure you take enough rest.
- If you need a painkiller, paracetamol is safe to take with warfarin and rivaroxaban, which are the blood thinners we use**. Aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as ibuprofen, should be avoided**, unless under the guidance of your GP. This is because they may interfere with your treatment.
- Other medication: Always check with your GP or pharmacist before taking any medication, including herbal or alternative treatments, to ensure they are safe to take with your treatment.
- Diet: Try to eat a healthy, balanced diet, and to avoid excessive changes in your weight during your treatment. Alcohol can interfere with warfarin, so it is recommended that you do not drink more than one to two units of alcohol per day if you are prescribed warfarin.
- Travel: Ideally, long distance travel is not advisable for six weeks after your diagnosis.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

Once you have been diagnosed with a PE, you will be seen by a **thrombosis nurse specialist** in the Haemostasis and Thrombosis Centre at St. Thomas' Hospital. You will then see a **thrombosis consultant** for further assessment within a week of seeing a nurse specialist.

Useful sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions/bloodclots

Thrombosis UK: www.thrombosisuk.org

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the Clinical Nurse Specialist at **t:** 020 7188 8632

Out of hours, please call the hospital switchboard on 020 7188 7188 and ask for **the haematology registrar on call**.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.
t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

NHS 111
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.
t: 111

Leaflet number: 3994/VER2
Date published: April 2018
Review date: April 2021
© 2018 Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust
A list of sources is available on request