East Kent Hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust

Von Willebrand's Disease (vWD)

Information for parents, patients, and carers from the Haemophilia Centre

What is von Willebrand's Disease (vWD)?

Von Willebrand's Disease (vWD) is the most common bleeding condition that affects blood clotting. It is thought to affect around one in every 100 of the population in the UK.

People with vWD do not bleed any faster, but may bleed for longer than expected.

Having vWD should not affect your everyday life. Most of the bleeding problems that happen tend to be after an injury, surgery, or dental treatment.

How does von Willebrand's Disease affect clotting?

Von Willebrand factor (vWF) is a protein that helps to make your blood clot when there is injury to a blood vessel. If you have von Willebrand's Disease you do not have enough of this protein for your blood to clot normally, or what you do have of the protein might not work as well as it should. vWF also helps the clotting system by carrying another of the clotting factors (factor VIII) so some people with vWD may also have low levels of factor VIII.

We care

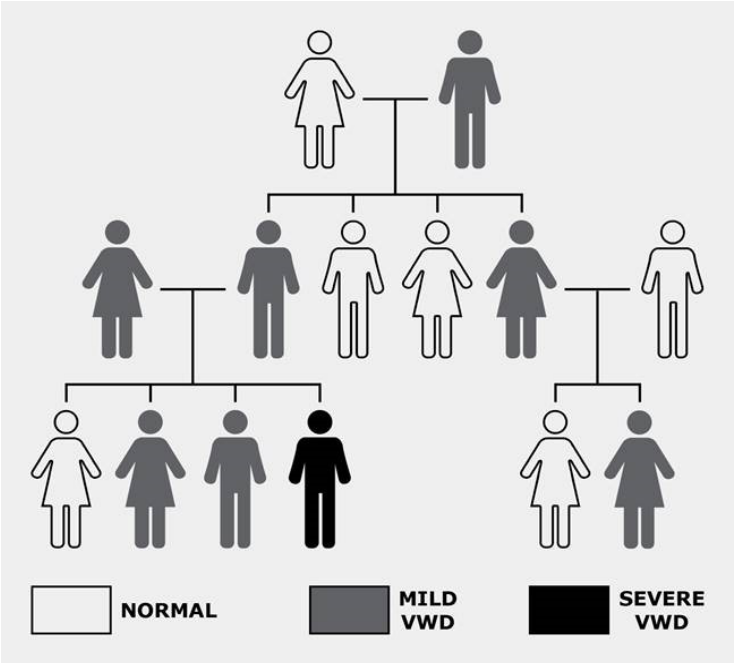
How do you get von Willebrand's Disease?

Von Willebrand's Disease is an inherited condition, you are born with it. Both men and women can inherit it.

One set of our genes is inherited from our mother and the other set from our father. Both parents must have the defective gene in order for the child to be more severely affected. Mutations can happen which mean that either the gene is unable to make enough vWF or that what it does make does not work as well as it should.

The diagram below shows how von Willebrand's Disease may be passed down through a family.

Family members can be affected differently depending on whether they have inherited the defective vWD gene from one or both parents. This is why testing them is important to establish the severity of the condition.



Von Willebrand Disease. © World Federation of Hemophilia 2012.
http://elearning.wfh.org/elearning-centres/vwd/#how_do_you_get_vwd

What are the different types of von Willebrand's Disease?

There are three main types of von Willebrand's Disease depending on whether the vWF is missing or it is not working properly - Type 1, Type 2, and Type 3.

- **Type 1** is the most common type (affecting around eight in 10 people with vWD). People with Type 1 vWD have lower levels of the von Willebrand factor. The symptoms are usually mild (see symptoms on next page).

- **Type 2** is second most common type (affecting up to two in every 10 people with vWD). In people with Type 2 vWD the von Willebrand factor does not work properly. There are four different subtypes of Type 2 vWD (2A, 2B, 2M, and 2N). There are generally more bleeding problems with Type 2 vWD than with Type 1. The type of treatment you need may be different depending on the sub type you have.

- **Type 3** is much rarer (affecting one in every 100 people with vWD). People with Type 3 vWD have little or no vWF and will have more serious bleeding problems including spontaneous bleeding (bleeding which happens for no apparent reason).

What are the symptoms of von Willebrand's Disease?

Common symptoms are:

- in women and girls, heavy and prolonged bleeding during your period (known as menorrhagia)
- nose bleeds
- bleeding from gums
- easy bruising
- bleeding after surgery
- bleeding after trauma or injury
- bleeding in the mother at childbirth

Rare symptoms are:

- blood in your urine (known as haematuria)
- bleeding in your stomach or intestines (blood in your stools (poo) or black tarry stools)

How is von Willebrand's Disease treated?

Day-to-day treatment is not needed for mild or moderate von Willebrand's Disease, however; it may be needed before and after surgery, dentistry, or injury.

The need for treatment will depend on:

- how severe your bleeding is
- the type of surgery or dental treatment you are having
- your previous history of bleeding
- your family's history of bleeding; and
- your level of vWF.

What are the treatments for von Willebrand's Disease?

There are three main treatments for vWD:

- Antifibrinolytic Agents (Tranexamic Acid)
- DDAVP (Octim)
- Voncento

- **Antifibrinolytic Agents (Tranexamic Acid)**

  Tranexamic Acid works by stopping the early breakdown of a clot that has been made after injury to your blood vessel. Fibrin is a protein that gives the blood clot stability. Tranexamic Acid stops the substances that destroy the fibrin within the clot.

  Often it is the only treatment needed for some people with vWD and for some procedures. It is particularly useful for mouth bleeding and therefore very good preventative treatment when you are having a dental procedure.

  This treatment is generally given as tablets. You may be asked crush the tablets in a small amount of water and swish it around your mouth, before either swallowing it or spitting it out (you will be advised by the haemophilia team which is best for you).

  Tranexamic Acid is not used when there is blood in your urine as small clots can occur which can then block your urinary tract and cause you pain.

Are there any side effects?
Common side effects from Tranexamic Acid include:
• nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting
• diarrhoea
• joint or muscle pain
• muscle cramps
• headache or migraine
• runny or stuffy nose
• stomach or abdominal pain

Other side effects may include skin rash and changes to your colour vision.

• **DDAVP (Octim)**
DDAVP (Octim, also called Desmopressin) is a synthetic (artificial) medicine given as a small injection under the skin that helps your blood to clot by releasing your own stores of von Willebrand factor. Please see separate information sheet **DDAVP** for more information.

Are there any possible side effects?
• red or flushed face (this is only temporary)
• headaches
• dizziness
• mild stomach pain
• nausea (sickness)
• allergic reactions (rare)
• fits (very rare).

• **Voncento**
DDAVP is not suitable for all patients (either because of other medical conditions or DDAVP does not increase your vWF level enough when it is given).

As the Voncento is made from donated blood, there is also an extremely small risk that you may acquire a blood-borne virus. There are ways in which these risks are minimised by the drug company. The first is that donors are carefully screened to make sure they do not carry these viruses. Secondly, testing for signs of viruses at each donation and finally, the Voncento is heat treated to inactivate or remove any possible viruses.

It is given to you either through a small butterfly needle or a cannula (a small tube into a vein in your arm) directly into the vein, over two to five minutes.

Are there any possible side effects?
• Allergic reaction
• Headaches
• Raise in body temperature
• Changes to the way things taste.

Where can I find more information about vWD?

There are several sources of useful information about von Willebrand's Disease, and these include:

- The Haemophilia Society www.haemophilia.org.uk
- Living with vWD www.livingwithvwd.org
- NHS www.nhs.uk/conditions/von-willebrand-disease

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 783145 or 01227 864314, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation

Information produced by the Haemophilia Centre
Date: June 2019 Review date: October 2021 Web 430