



A guide to...

Pulmonary Embolism

Patient Information

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If you need this leaflet in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01923 217 198** or email **westherts.pals@nhs.net**



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Introduction

You have been diagnosed with having a developed a blood clot in your lungs called a pulmonary embolism (PE). This leaflet will give you information about what this means and how you will be looked after.

What is a Pulmonary Embolism (PE)?

A PE is a blockage of a blood vessel in your lungs. This is usually caused by blood clots that travel from the deep veins in your leg, known as Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). The blood vessels in the lungs are very small and are easily blocked when the clot becomes wedged. The clot may prevent blood travelling to that section of the lung.

Why might PE occur?

Sometimes a reason cannot be found, but the following have been identified as potential risk factors for developing a PE:

- Previous thrombosis or family history
- Pregnancy and up to six weeks after delivery; miscarriage or termination of pregnancy
- Recent surgery/trauma
- Contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy
- History of cancer
- Over 60 years old
- Reduced or impaired mobility caused by long travel journeys, illnesses or injury.
- Being overweight
- Certain blood clotting disorders
- Smoking
- Varicose veins

Why is a PE treated?

- To help prevent the blood clot extending.
- To help reduce the risk of further pulmonary embolism.
- To help relieve the severe symptoms of PE.

How is PE treated?

Treatment is with anticoagulants, and this will be fully explained to you by either your nurse, pharmacist or doctor. Most are in tablet form, but some are given by injection.

If you are prescribed injectable anticoagulation (Heparins) please advise your healthcare professional if you have a latex allergy or have concerns about receiving a drug that is derived from animal origins. The injection we normally prescribe is Enoxaparin which is a heparin.

If you are prescribed Apixaban or Rivaroxaban tablets, please advise your healthcare professional if you have a lactose intolerance.

You will be given specific written information relating to your prescribed treatment. The anticoagulant drug you have been prescribed does not actually dissolve the clot, as this is naturally absorbed by the body over time. The drug prevents the clot becoming any bigger reduces the risk of further complications.

For how long do I need to take anticoagulant medication?

The recommended duration for a PE is three to six months. Long term treatment is often advised to reduce the risk of PEs in the future and especially if no clear cause for your PE is found.

This decision is based on your specific circumstances and will be discussed with you at a follow-up hospital appointment. You will be sent an appointment for three months to be seen in our outpatient PE clinic by a consultant.

Pain relief

Appropriate pain relief, if required, will be discussed with you. Please avoid over the counter non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as Ibuprofen.

General advice

- 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 anticoagulant.
- Please advise any health care professional that you are taking an anticoagulant including your dentist.
- Please do not take Aspirin unless advised or prescribed by a health care professional.
- Speak to your GP if you become pregnant or are planning a pregnancy, whilst taking anticoagulants
- Seek urgent medical help if you experience a significant blow the head.
- Always carry the alert card that is provided with your medication.
- You can also reduce the risk of further blood clotting by changing habits to lead a healthier lifestyle, including:
 - stopping smoking - if you smoke, quitting is the best thing you can do for your health
 - avoid becoming dehydrated.
 - maintaining a healthy weight, by eating a healthy balanced diet.

Exercise and rest

You may find that your physical activity is limited due to your symptoms. It is advisable to avoid prolonged periods of exercise and to ensure you take adequate rest. If unsure, please check with your GP. If you also have a DVT or leg swelling, it is advisable to elevate your legs on a stool, level with your hips or heart, or rest on your bed or sofa. This will help to relieve the swelling.

Travel

Ideally, long distance travel is not advisable for six weeks after your diagnosis. If you have any further queries regarding travel, please consult your GP for advice.

Further information

NHS UK: www.nhs.uk/conditions/pulmonary-embolism

British Lung Foundation: www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/pulmonary-embolism

Thrombosis UK: <https://thrombosisuk.org/information-fact-sheets.php>

Stop Smoking: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/health-in-herts/smoking/stop-smoking-service