



Management of Deep Vein Thrombosis

Evidence Based Information Sheets for Consumers

The best available evidence ...



Following surgery



What is evidence based health information?

Just as a detective searches for evidence to solve a crime, so too do health professionals look for evidence to guide their practice. The detective must have evidence to support their case. In a similar fashion, the health care professional must have evidence to support their proposed course of treatment. They search for information that will help them to provide the most effective or beneficial form of care to their patients. Due to the wealth of information available to them, the process of discovering which information is the best can be difficult and time consuming. It would take an enormous amount of time for your doctor to sift through the large amounts of research and information available to them on a particular topic. This is where the Joanna Briggs Institute comes into play. We conduct the 'detective' work, providing them (and you) with the best available evidence.

Evidence Reliability

The evidence related to the topic of each consumer publication produced by the Joanna Briggs Institute is assessed for reliability and quality. We do not rate a procedure or treatment, but the evidence (or research) that is available to support it.

Evidence can play a critical role in any investigation and it is important for detectives to recognise evidence that will provide 'reliable' information to aid in the investigation. This is also the case when assessing health information, as some types of evidence are more reliable than others.

For Joanna Briggs Institute evidence based information for consumers, you can be assured that the best available evidence is utilised. If you would like more information about research and levels of evidence, please contact the Joanna Briggs Institute or visit the research page of our consumer web site.

"The procedures described in this pamphlet must only be used by people who have appropriate expertise in the field to which the procedure relates. The applicability of any information must be established before relying on it. While care has been taken to ensure that this pamphlet summarises available research and expert consensus, any loss, damage, cost, expense or liability suffered or incurred as a result of reliance on these procedures (whether arising in contract, negligence or otherwise) is, to the extent permitted by law, excluded".

What does this mean for consumers?

As consumers of health care it is important to know that your treatment is being based on the best available evidence. It is also important that you are provided with all of the information in order to have greater independence in relation to your own health care decisions and to be involved in the decision making process.

Further information

The Joanna Briggs Institute Consumer Information Program provides up to date literature reviews to ensure your information is based on the best available evidence. The Institute also produces systematic reviews and Best Practice Information sheets aimed at clinicians and health professionals. This means you are provided with the same high standard of publications based on the same information as those working directly in the field.

Contact details

The Joanna Briggs Institute has collaborating centres throughout Australia and overseas. If you would like more information on the Institute, its publications or wish to contact a Joanna Briggs Institute collaborating centre near you, please visit our web site:

www.joannabriggs.edu.au



THE JOANNA BRIGGS INSTITUTE

Level 4, Margaret Graham Building
Royal Adelaide Hospital
North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia 5000

email: jbi@adelaide.edu.au

ph: +61 8 8303 4880 fax: +61 8 8303 4881

About DVT's

What is a DVT?

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is when a clot forms in a vein, commonly in the legs or pelvis. They are dangerous because if a DVT remains in the leg vein, it can cause a number of complications, including inflammation and leg ulcers. However, the real danger occurs if the clot leaves the vein and travels through the circulatory system. The clot can block off the main artery to the lungs and this can be fatal.

Who is at risk?

You may be at risk of developing a DVT if you:

- Have had a DVT before or a family history of DVT
- Are not able to move around (e.g. if you are sitting or lying down for long periods of time)
- Have had recent surgery (minor or major)
- Are over 40 years of age
- Have had a major medical illness (such as cancer)
- Have had a major trauma or burns
- Have had limb trauma and/or orthopedic procedures
- Are overweight

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include localised redness and warmth, an increase in the size of the leg, tenderness, pain or a dull ache in the calf that worsens when walking.

References

This Consumer Information Sheet has been based on a systematic review and Best Practice Information Sheet undertaken by the Joanna Briggs Institute under the guidance of a review panel of clinical experts.

The Joanna Briggs Institute (2001) Graduated Compression Stockings for the Prevention of Post-operative Venous Thromboembolism, Vol 5, Issue 2

Treatment Options

Get moving

For the blood to flow through your leg veins it needs some help so that it flows up instead of down. By working your calf muscles, they can act as a pump and force the blood in these veins up towards the heart. Sitting still for long periods of time allows blood to sit still in the veins and this can mean that a clot might form. One of the easiest ways of preventing a DVT is to begin to move around as soon as possible after your surgery. This will help with blood flow, which in turn will help to prevent a blood clot from forming.

Stockings

Elastic compression stockings may be used to encourage blood flow in the veins by applying pressure. These stockings are specially designed so that a different pressure is applied to different areas of the leg. Pressure is firmest at the ankle, and gradually reduces as the distance from the ankle increases. When wearing stockings there is a small risk that if they are too tight they can decrease the blood flow to the skin, so it is important that they are fitted properly.

Medication

Blood contains 'clotting' agents. These agents are sticky and help the blood to thicken (coagulate). If a blood vessel is cut, the clotting agents collect at the site of the injury and create a plug to seal off the wound (scab). The ability of the blood to clot is important for survival, but it can also lead to the formation of a thrombus (clot). Medication can be used to thin the blood. This may dissolve the clot and stop others from forming where they shouldn't.

The evidence suggests...

- If possible, it is best to move around after surgery and try not to sit for long periods of time. Your health professional will assist you with this.
- If you are able to, wearing stockings before surgery may help to prevent DVT's.
- It is important that stockings are fitted carefully and legs and feet are dry before stockings are put on.
- Stockings should be removed regularly for skin care, assessment and hygiene (at least daily and more often where required). There should be no bunching or overlapping of stockings.
- When wearing stockings it is important to be aware of symptoms like localised redness or warmth, an increase in leg size, tenderness or pain that worsens when walking. Inform your health professional as soon as you experience any of these.