

Post-thrombotic syndrome

This leaflet is for people at risk of developing post-thrombotic syndrome. It explains what this is and gives advice on managing the symptoms.

What is a post-thrombotic syndrome (PTS)?

It is a common complication that may occur after someone has suffered from a deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

PTS is a chronic (long term) and potentially disabling condition, caused by damage to the veins. It can lead to increased pressure on the vein walls, which damages the valves that normally work to keep blood flowing up the leg.

A reduction in the amount of blood being carried away from the foot and lower leg can lead to pain, swelling and, in the most severe cases, leg ulcers, which are often slow to heal. Up to 30% (3 out of every 10) people who have had thrombosis in the leg will develop some post-thrombotic symptoms within five years. Most episodes of post thrombotic syndrome will develop within six months to two years of the initial thrombosis. Although for some patients, it can take up to 20 years for symptoms to develop.

People who have had more than one episode of deep vein thrombosis in the same leg are at higher risk of developing post-thrombotic syndrome.

What are the symptoms of post-thrombotic syndrome?

- Continued or occasional swelling
- Aching
- Cramping
- Itching, tingling or pins and needles
- Hardening of skin
- Varicose veins
- Venous ulcers (in severe cases)
- Discolouration of skin

How can I manage the symptoms?

- Elevate (raise) your legs while sitting.
- Wear grade 2 compression stockings, which will create gentle pressure and improve your circulation by helping to move blood up your leg. Your GP can supply these.
- Do regular exercises to help improve your PTS symptoms
- Take simple painkillers, like paracetamol or ibuprofen, to help reduce the soreness in your calves. If you need stronger pain relief, contact your GP.
- Care for any wounds as they develop. Your GP can advise on wound care.
- Aim to maintain a healthy weight as high body mass index (BMI) is found to put more strain on the veins in the legs. You can calculate your own BMI here <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-weight/bmi-calculator/>

Is there any medication to treat PTS?

Although the treatment of post-thrombotic syndrome with drugs has been studied, they are not widely used because none have been shown to be of major benefit. If standard treatment is not working for you, and particularly if you develop leg ulcers due to poor blood flow, your doctor may consider referring you to a vascular surgeon to see if there is an operation that might help, although this is usually not suitable for most patients.

References

[Thrombosis UK | The Thrombosis Charity wishes to increase awareness of thrombosis among the public and health professionals and to raise research funds to improve patient care. Helping people who suffer from VTE, DVT, PE and clots.](#)

[Complications](#) | [Background information](#) | [Deep vein thrombosis](#) | [CKS](#) | [NICE](#)

Who to contact for more advice

For advice regarding DVTs and PTS, contact the DVT Clinic, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays) 8.30am to 3.30pm on 0118 322 7461 or email rbft.aecu@nhs.net, or contact your GP.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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Next review due: July 2024