

Basics for Blessties: Side Effects

Blood Clots & Cancer Associated Thrombosis

Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) is the umbrella term for any blood clot that forms in a vein. A blood clot is blood that has thickened and clumped together inside a vein. Types of VTE include:



Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) — when a blood clot forms in a deep vein, usually in the leg, thigh, pelvis, or even in the arm.



Pulmonary Embolism (PE) — when a piece of a blood clot breaks loose and travels to the lungs, it can become stuck in a lung artery, blocking blood flow from the heart. This may develop from an untreated DVT, but it can also occur on its own.

When these conditions are a result of cancer or its treatment, they are called “Cancer Associated.”

According to the CDC, cancer patients—especially those on chemotherapy — have a much higher risk of DVT. And Black women are at higher risk for cancer-associated venous thromboembolism (VTE) than any other race. Having cancer, undergoing chemotherapy and other cancer treatments, surgery, and central lines/ports can all increase your risk of developing DVT and/or PE. A blood clot can show up anywhere from a few days to many years following treatment.

**Don't Ignore
the Symptoms**

While these risks are real and deserve your attention, it's important to move forward with treatment anyway. Cancer is a much bigger threat to your health than the potential risk of a blood clot.

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS

Will occur on one side of the body—usually in the leg, but can happen in an arm or around a port/central line. DVT can also move towards your lung, so the location of your symptoms may move too. Keep an eye out for any of the following:

- **Pain similar to a charley horse or a cramp that doesn't go away**
- **Swelling**
- **Tenderness**
- **Skin that is warm to the touch**
- **Redness or discolouration of the skin (may look like a rash)**

PULMONARY EMBOLISM

A PE can develop from an untreated DVT, but it can also occur on its own. Keep an eye out for any of the following:

- **An unusually fast or irregular heartbeat**
- **Chest pain or tightness in the chest or back (can feel similar to indigestion)**
- **A drop in blood pressure, lightheadedness, dizziness, or fainting**
- **Shortness of breath, trouble breathing, or becoming easily winded**
- **Cough (with or without blood) or wheezing**
- **Swelling**
- **Feeling tired or lethargic**

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What You Can Do...

1. Trust your gut and don't dismiss symptoms. If something feels strange, take it seriously. This is not the time to push through or walk it off.

Blood clots are dangerous. But if you develop one, recognizing it early, getting to a hospital, and starting treatment quickly can prevent severe symptoms.

2. Ask your doctor about your risk for blood clots and the possibility of preventative medication. Anyone diagnosed with cancer is more prone to blood clots, but your doctor should assess these risk factors:

- *If anyone in your family has a history of blood clots*
- *A personal history of blood clots, fractures (broken bones), heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, heart failure, or hyperlipidemia*
- *Smoking*
- *Obesity*
- *Age (the older you are, the higher your risk)*
- *Pregnancy (during pregnancy and postpartum, your risk increases)*
- *Race (Black women are at higher risk for developing a cancer-related blood clot)*
- *Certain breast cancer treatments*

3. **Stay hydrated.**

When you're dehydrated, your blood can thicken and become stickier (think molasses). Thick blood flows through your veins more slowly, making it easier for a blood clot to form.

Drinking plenty of water keeps your blood thinner and allows it to flow more easily, supporting good circulation and lowering your risk of a blood clot.

4. **Move around as much as possible.**

You don't have to run a marathon, but it's important to get your blood flowing on a regular basis. Try not to sit or lie in one position for too long. Walking, stretching, yoga, dance parties... even wiggling your fingers and toes or flexing your hands and feet all help decrease your risk of a blood clot.

5. **Make a plan for long roadtrips, train rides, or flights.**

- *Change positions often and get up as much as you can (bathroom breaks are a great chance to stretch your legs!)*
- *Bring a water bottle & stay hydrated*
- *Wear compression socks for any trip over four hours*
- *Wear compression sleeves*