

Mark D. Wigod, MD, PA - Pulmonary Embolism / Deep Venous Thrombosis

Deep Venous Thrombosis (DVT) refers to a blood clot embedded in one of the major deep veins of the legs. Local blockage may cause pain, swelling, or warmth of the affected leg. This may be a temporary or long term problem. The clot may also break loose, or embolize. If it becomes lodged in the pulmonary artery of the lung, it is called a Pulmonary Embolism (PE). This may lead to severe difficulty breathing, or even death. In otherwise healthy patients undergoing elective surgery, DVT / PE is one of the potentially most serious health problem which may occur after surgery. Accordingly, Dr. Wigod takes every precaution to avoid these problems and then investigate suspicious symptoms if they occur. Embolic conditions may be treated with thinning the blood (anti-coagulation), but prevention is the best strategy. Despite every effort, embolisms are a known and accepted risk of surgery and cannot be totally avoided. Several factors can make someone more likely to develop an embolism:

- Recent surgery
- Immobilization
- Travel- Prolonged travel, such as sitting in an airplane or a long car trip, allows blood to sit in the legs and increases risk of clot formation.
- Obesity
- Hormone Replacement Therapy or Oral Contraceptive use (less than one year)
- Previous history of DVT or PE

Prevention

- While under a general anesthetic, blood flow in your legs will be maintained with Sequential Compressions Devices (squeezing cuffs)
- You should walk frequently after your operation (at least 4 times per day)
- After long surgeries, you may be given enoxaparin (Lovenox- a low molecular weight heparin) to help thin your blood. This may slightly increase your risk of bleeding.
- If you travel by car or airplane after surgery, minimize bending your legs for long periods and get up to walk approximately every half hour

PE may be very difficult to diagnose. Some possible signs and symptoms include:

- Chest pain- Pain is very sharp and stabbing in nature, has a sudden onset, and is worse when taking a deep breath (referred to as pleuritic chest pain).
- Shortness of breath
- Anxiety or apprehension
- Cough- This is usually a dry cough but may be associated with blood.
- Sweating
- Passing out

DVT with progression to PE has the potential to be fatal. If you suspect that you have a DVT or PE, you should notify Dr. Wigod and/or seek immediate medical attention.