

The Prevention of Blood Clots (Venous thromboembolism Prophylaxis [Deep Vein Thrombosis & Pulmonary Embolus]) during Orthopaedic Surgery

The prevention of blood clots is a major consideration in all orthopaedic operations. The risk assessment charts and clinical guidelines drawn up by the British National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and by the American College of Chest Physicians (ACCP) to help surgeons identify patients who have a higher risk of clotting are currently under review and this paper will be updated accordingly. Where appropriate there are both mechanical and pharmacological treatments that help reduce the risk.

As a patient you should have the expectation that your surgical team will discuss your risk of having a blood clot with you &/or your family/carer, and that you will be treated with the most appropriate and up-to-date therapies available in line with the locally agreed guidelines.

Risk assessment:

Not all operations have the same potential for blood clots to develop, and the risk is different in every patient.

Therefore, during your pre-operative assessment appointment for elective surgery with your Surgeon or one of their team they will be looking closely at various indicators that help them assess your risk of clotting in relation to the operation that you are about to have.

Some of the factors they will be looking at include:

Your age & weight,
if you smoke,
if you are pregnant or taking oral contraceptives or hormone replacement therapy,
if you have varicose veins and how easily your blood clots.
how well your heart & lungs are working
if you or your family have a history of bleeding or clotting problems
how well you get around,
if you have cancer
how long you will be in theatre & how long you will have to stay in bed after the operation.

Your surgeon will then balance the risk of your developing a clot against the extra risk of bleeding during and immediately after the surgery.

Your surgeon will be able to decide with you if you need thrombo-prophylaxis (treatment to reduce the risk of clots) and which method to adopt, in line with the local policy. These methods include mechanical appliances (e.g. elastic stockings) and pharmacological medicines (drugs given either by injection or by mouth).

So, following this assessment you will be given the appropriate preventative measures, unless there are medical reasons why this is not be advisable.