



Reducing Your Risk of Blood Clots:

Some practical Steps and Lifestyle Adjustments for Better Outcomes

Blood clots, or thrombi, are gel-like masses formed by platelets and fibrin in the blood to stop bleeding. While clots are essential for healing cuts and injuries, they can become dangerous if they form inappropriately within veins or arteries, potentially leading to serious health complications such as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), pulmonary embolism (PE), heart attack, or stroke. Understanding how to reduce your risk of developing a blood clot is crucial for maintaining optimal health, particularly if you have certain risk factors or a family history of clotting disorders.

Understanding Blood Clots

Before diving into prevention strategies, it's important to understand what blood clots are and why they matter. There are two primary types of clots:

- Arterial clots: These form in arteries and can lead to heart attack or stroke.
- Venous clots: These form in veins, most commonly as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), and can travel to the lungs, causing a pulmonary embolism (PE).

Clots can block blood flow and damage organs. Some clots dissolve on their own, but others require medical intervention.

Major Risk Factors for Blood Clots

Risk factors for blood clots include:

- Inherited clotting disorders (e.g., Factor V Leiden)
- Prolonged immobility (long flights, bed rest, or hospitalization)
- Recent surgery or trauma, especially to the legs or hips

- Cancer and certain cancer treatments
- Pregnancy and recent childbirth
- Use of hormone therapy or birth control pills containing estrogen
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Chronic illnesses (heart disease, inflammatory bowel disease, etc.)
- Age over 60
- COVID-19 infection or other severe infections

Understanding your risk factors is the first step in formulating a prevention strategy.

General Strategies to Reduce Your Risk

1. Stay Active and Avoid Prolonged Immobility

Physical activity improves circulation and prevents blood from pooling in the veins, particularly in the legs. If you must sit for long periods (due to work, travel, or recovery), remember to:

- Stand up and walk every 1-2 hours
- Flex and stretch your legs and ankles while sitting
- Consider wearing compression stockings during long flights or car rides

2. Maintain a Healthy Weight

Obesity is a significant risk factor. Losing excess weight through a combination of diet and exercise can reduce the pressure on your veins and lower your risk.

3. Hydrate Regularly

Dehydration can thicken your blood, making it more likely to clot. Drink water throughout the day, especially when traveling or in hot weather.

4. Quit Smoking

Smoking damages the lining of blood vessels and increases your risk of clotting. Quitting can significantly lower your overall risk of vascular disease.

5. Eat a Balanced Diet

A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats supports overall cardiovascular health. Limit foods high in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol, which can contribute to arterial plaque formation.

6. Limit Alcohol Consumption

Excessive alcohol can affect blood clotting and interact with medications. If you drink, do so in moderation.

Specific Situations and Preventive Measures

During Hospitalization or Surgery

If you are hospitalized or scheduled for surgery, especially orthopedic or cancer-related procedures, you may be at increased risk. Ask your healthcare provider about:

- Blood-thinning medications (anticoagulants)
- Early mobilization (getting out of bed and moving as soon as possible)
- Compression devices or stockings
- Physical therapy interventions

Travel and Long-Distance Movement

Traveling for more than four hours, by plane, car, or train, increases risk. Take steps to prevent clots:

- Stand and walk periodically
- Rotate ankles and stretch legs while seated
- Avoid crossing legs for prolonged periods
- Stay hydrated and avoid excessive alcohol intake
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing

Pregnancy and Hormonal Therapy

Pregnancy and certain birth control pills or hormone treatments can increase clotting risk. If you are pregnant or considering hormone therapy:

- Discuss risk factors with your healthcare provider
- Monitor for symptoms such as leg swelling, pain, or sudden shortness of breath
- Consider alternatives if you have a family or personal history of blood clots

Chronic Conditions

Manage chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease under the guidance of your healthcare provider. Regular check-ups and medication adherence are crucial.

Warning Signs and When to Seek Help

Recognizing the early symptoms of blood clots can be life-saving. Seek immediate medical attention if you experience:

- Sudden swelling, pain, warmth, or redness in one leg (possible DVT)
- Unexplained shortness of breath, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, or coughing up blood (possible PE)
- Sudden severe headache, vision changes, difficulty speaking, or weakness on one side of the body (possible stroke)

Medications and Medical Devices

Some people require medications to prevent clots:

- Anticoagulants: Drugs like warfarin, heparin, or direct oral anticoagulants may be prescribed if you have a history of clots or certain medical conditions.
- Aspirin: Sometimes recommended for certain arterial disease patients.
- Compression stockings: Can help prevent blood pooling in legs.

Always discuss risks and benefits with your healthcare provider, as blood thinners can increase bleeding risk.

Genetic and Family Factors

If you have a close family member who has experienced blood clots, or if you have a known genetic predisposition, discuss with your doctor about:

- Screening for clotting disorders
- Proactive preventive strategies
- Personalized risk assessment

Lifestyle Habits for Prevention

Adopting healthy habits reduces risk and improves overall well-being:

- Engage in regular aerobic exercise (walking, cycling, swimming)
- Avoid prolonged periods of inactivity
- Practice good posture and leg positioning
- Incorporate stretching into your daily routine
- Attend regular medical check-ups, especially if you have risk factors

Frequently Asked Questions

Can supplements help prevent blood clots?

Some supplements, like fish oil (omega-3), may support cardiovascular health, but evidence for preventing clots is limited. Always talk to your doctor before starting supplements, as some may interact with medications.

Are there warning signs before a clot forms?

Often, there may be no warning signs until a clot causes symptoms. That's why prevention and awareness are essential.

How often should I move during travel?

Aim to move at least every 1-2 hours during long journeys. Short walks, ankle circles, and leg stretches help keep blood circulating.

If I have a history of blood clots, should I avoid exercise?

Most people benefit from regular physical activity, but consult your healthcare provider about the safest types of exercise for your situation.

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