

Patient information factsheet

Superficial thrombophlebitis

We have written this factsheet to give you information on superficial thrombophlebitis. It includes the symptoms to look out for and how it can be treated. If you have any further questions, please speak to a member of your healthcare team who will be pleased to help you.

What is superficial thrombophlebitis?

Superficial thrombophlebitis is the term for inflammation (swelling) of a vein near the surface of the skin caused by a blood clot.

What are the symptoms?

Superficial thrombophlebitis results in painful, hard lumps underneath the skin and redness of the overlying skin. This usually occurs on the legs, but it can also affect surface veins in the arms and, on rare occasions, in the penis or breast.

Is it a serious condition?

Superficial thrombophlebitis is not in itself a life-threatening condition. Usually the blood clot will clear and the inflammation will ease within a few weeks.

Most people with superficial thrombophlebitis are otherwise well. The lumps under your skin may be painful, but they shouldn't stop you from walking well. Please contact us if you notice any discharge or an abscess (a painful collection of pus, usually caused by a bacterial infection), or if your whole leg begins to swell.

Who's most at risk?

You are more at risk of superficial thrombophlebitis if you:

- have varicose veins
- smoke
- are overweight
- take the combined oral contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- are pregnant
- have had previous blood clots
- have recently had injections or a drip put into a vein
- have a condition that causes the blood to clot more easily, such as thrombophilia, polyarteritis (inflammation of the smaller arteries) or polycythaemia (a high concentration of red blood cells in your blood)
- have cancer

How is it treated?

We may give you an anticoagulant (a medicine that helps prevent blood clots) to stop the blood clot getting bigger.

Patient information factsheet

To help reduce any pain and swelling you should:

- raise the leg to help reduce swelling
- keep active to keep the blood circulating
- press a cold flannel over the vein to ease any pain
- take anti-inflammatory pain relief (unless on anticoagulant medication)
- rub an anti-inflammatory cream or gel on the affected area

What is the outlook?

When the inflammation settles, you may be left with a patch of darkened skin and the lump may take three or four months to go. Most people will make a full recovery. Taking anticoagulants can help speed up your recovery.

If the thrombophlebitis occurred in a varicose vein, it is likely that the varicose veins will keep coming back, possibly with further episodes of thrombophlebitis.

Risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT)

There is a small chance that the blood clot may travel along the superficial vein to a deeper vein and a DVT developing. This is more likely to happen if the surface blood clot spreads into areas where superficial veins meet deeper veins, such as the upper thigh, groin or behind the knee. It's also more likely to occur if the affected vein is a normal vein rather than a varicose vein, if you've had a DVT before or if you're immobile.

A DVT can cause pain, swelling and a heavy ache in your leg. Please seek urgent medical help if you experience any of these symptoms.

Contact us

If you do not see or feel an improvement in your symptoms, please contact us on **023 8120 6284** from 9am to 5pm (including weekends) and we will review your symptoms.

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/phlebitis

If you need a translation of this document, an interpreter or a version in large print, Braille or on audio tape, please telephone 023 8120 4688 for help.