

Post-thrombotic syndrome



What is post-thrombotic syndrome?

This is the name given to a collection of long-term problems that may develop after having a deep vein thrombosis (DVT) in your leg. It develops when there is permanent damage to the internal lining of your veins as a result of DVT. This damage prevents the blood flowing properly within your veins and in some cases causes a backflow or 'reflux' of blood.

Will I get it?

One in three people who have had a DVT will develop some degree of post-thrombotic syndrome. It usually develops within two years of your original thrombosis being diagnosed, although it sometimes develops much later. People who have had two or more separate DVTs are at a higher risk of developing post-thrombotic syndrome.

What are the symptoms?

It can be very hard to diagnose because the symptoms are very similar to an acute thrombosis. Symptoms vary from very mild to severe and may include one or more of the following:

- heaviness of the leg
- pain
- leg cramps
- numbness or tingling
- itchy, dry skin
- swelling and fluid accumulation in your lower legs
- redness or discoloured skin
- leg ulcers.

How is it diagnosed?

There is no single test to diagnose post-thrombotic syndrome. Diagnosis is usually reached when one or more of the symptoms listed above are present. Sometimes when an acute thrombosis is suspected, a diagnosis of post-thrombotic syndrome is made if scans reveal chronic damage or scarring within the veins.

Is it dangerous?

No, but it can cause long-term health problems that lead to a poor quality of life and increased costs to you and the NHS.

How is it treated?

Post Thrombotic Syndrome can be difficult to treat however wearing elasticated, compression hosiery may help you to manage the symptoms of PTS. We advise that you make an appointment to be measured and fitted for these by the practice nurse at your GP surgery. However, not everyone is suitable for compression stockings and your practice nurse may test the blood flow within your legs before fitting them. There is no time limit to the overall length of time compression stockings should be worn if they provide benefit.

What will happen if I don't wear the stockings?

It is possible that the symptoms of post-thrombotic syndrome may settle down. However, it is more likely that they will get worse. In the worst cases some patients may develop permanent skin discolouration and leg ulcers. Once established these may take a very long time to heal.

What else can I do?

- Keep mobile and exercise regularly
- Raise your legs whenever you sit down
- Try to avoid standing for long periods
- Use a moisturiser if your skin is dry
- Report any new symptoms or changes in your legs to your GP.

Contact us

If you have any questions about your treatment please contact your local GP or the Anticoagulation Team at the Royal Cornwall Hospital on:

01872 253597

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

Further information

Further information on the management and treatment of thrombosis is available from:

Thrombosis UK, PO Box 58, Llanwdra, SA19 0AD
or online at www.thrombosisuk.org

British Committee for Standards in Haematology (BCSH)
www.bcsghguidelines.com

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

