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DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Blood Clots

Blood clots can lead to dangerous problems, so it's important to work with your doctor to determine the best treatment. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Thrombosis	The condition in which an abnormal blood clot develops inside a blood vessel, producing at least some obstruction to blood flow. The blood clot itself is called a thrombus.
Embolus	An embolus (or embolism) occurs when a thrombus dislodges from its site of formation and travels through the circulatory system until it lodges elsewhere. The embolus often shuts down blood flow wherever it lodges, potentially causing serious organ damage.
Pulmonary Embolism	In a pulmonary embolism, a thrombus that has formed in a vein breaks loose (or embolizes), and travels through the venous system to the lungs. There, it can cause lung damage. If it is large enough, a pulmonary embolism can cause severe shortness of breath, bleeding into the airways, or death.
Embolic Stroke	An embolic stroke occurs when a thrombus that has formed in the heart or in a major artery breaks loose and subsequently lodges in a brain artery, causing damage to brain tissue.
Infarction	Tissue death caused by a blockage to the tissue's blood supply. Infarctions are often caused by blood clots; either by local thrombus formation, or by embolization from a distant thrombus. An embolic stroke is one example of an infarction.
Clotting Factors	A series of blood proteins that become activated by tissue trauma and then undergo a cascade of chemical reactions that promote the formation of a blood clot. Various abnormalities in one or more of the clotting factors can lead to excessive thrombus formation, or insufficient thrombus formation (bleeding).
Platelets	Tiny blood cells that act in concert with the clotting factors to form blood clots.
Anti-Coagulant Medication	A family of drugs (often called "blood thinners"), that impede blood clotting by inhibiting one or more of the clotting factors. Thrombosis, especially in the veins, is usually treated with one or more of these drugs.
Anti-Platelet Medication	Medication that inhibits blood clotting by reducing the activity of the platelets. Anti-platelet medication is often used to treat or prevent blood clots in the arteries.

Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your blood clots.

About Symptoms

- ❑ Aside from symptoms I have already experienced, are there any additional symptoms I should be alert for?
- ❑ What symptoms should I call you about?
- ❑ What symptoms should lead me to call 911?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- ❑ Why do you believe I developed a blood clot?
- ❑ What medical problems do I have, if any, that make abnormal clotting more likely?
- ❑ How likely am I to develop another blood clot in the future?
- ❑ Should I be worried about becoming pregnant, or using birth control or hormone replacement therapy?
- ❑ Does my weight, or my typical level of daily activity, contribute to my risk of developing another blood clot?
- ❑ How much of a role does my smoking habit play in my risk of a blood clot?
- ❑ What other lifestyle changes could I make that would reduce my chances of another blood clot?

About Diagnosis

- ❑ Have you tested my clotting factors to see whether abnormality in one of them may have contributed to my blood clot?
- ❑ Have you tested my platelets to see whether a platelet abnormality may have contributed to my blood clot?

About Treatment

- ❑ Do I need initial treatment with an injectable anticoagulant, or can I begin treatment right away with pills?
- ❑ Am I a good candidate for one of the newer anticoagulant drugs that do not require frequent blood tests, or would I be better off with the older drug (Coumadin) that requires regular blood testing?

About Treatment (continued)

- ❑ Will I be on just one drug, or a combination?
- ❑ If you are recommending a combination of medicines, why do you think the benefit will outweigh the added risk of using two drugs?
- ❑ How long do you think I will need to be on this medication?
- ❑ What should I do if I forget to take my medication on time?
- ❑ Aside from an increased risk of bleeding, what potential side effects of my medications should I be aware of?
- ❑ What should I do if I notice unusual bleeding?

About Living With Blood Clots

- ❑ What limitations do I have on my activities?
- ❑ Do I need to be concerned about sitting for a long time, or taking long car or airplane rides?
- ❑ How much water should I drink?
- ❑ How much weight do you recommend I lose?
- ❑ What do you recommend to help me increase my daily activity?
- ❑ Can you recommend a good smoking cessation program?