

THE Beat

A publication of
the North American
Thrombosis Forum



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After a Blood Clot?**

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Who Should I See After Being Diagnosed with a Blood Clot?

When you have a major event like a blood clot, the medical system can sometimes feel overwhelming. What type of doctor should you see? How can you find the specialists that you need?

Your primary care provider coordinates your care

Your primary care provider, or PCP, is the person that you see for annual wellness visits and other routine care. Your primary care team—which may include doctors, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, medical assistants, and office staff—plays a few different roles in your care, one of which is to coordinate your care when you have a complex medical situation. Your PCP is like the quarterback of your care team.

Your PCP will determine which specialists you should see, provide

referrals if necessary, and keep an eye on reports from different specialists. Your primary care team will help ensure that nothing falls through the cracks and that the recommended treatments from various specialists work well together. Your PCP will also oversee your medications and make sure that none of them interact with one other.

You may have seen your PCP when you first felt the symptoms of a blood clot – but if you got care for your blood clot in an emergency department (ED), urgent care clinic, or hospital, your PCP should be notified.

You should also see your PCP a few days after you get home from the ED or hospital.

Specialists involved in blood clot care

After a blood clot, your medical care may involve one or more medical specialists (doctors or healthcare professionals who specialize in a certain type of medicine). There are several types of specialists who may be involved in your care after a blood clot.

The specialist you need will depend on the specifics of your medical situation. For example, your treatment will be different if your blood clot occurred in a vein versus an artery.

Here are some of the specialists that you might end up seeing after your clot:



A vascular surgeon or interventional radiologist

Interventional radiologists (IR) are specialists that use imaging, such as x-rays or CT scans, to perform certain medical procedures. For example, imaging can help an IR guide tools like catheters through a person's blood vessels.

You may need an open surgical procedure to remove a blood clot from a vein or artery. In these cases, a vascular surgeon will open the affected blood vessel, remove the clot, and then repair the vessel.

A clot can also be removed or dissolved through a less invasive procedure in which a catheter is inserted through the skin into a blood vessel. The catheter is then threaded to the site of the clot and the clot can be physically removed – or medications can be delivered

directly to the clot to dissolve it. These procedures may be performed by a vascular surgeon or interventional radiologist.

Not all clots are treated using one of these procedures; in some cases, medications alone are used. If you require a procedure, your care team will outline your options and carefully explain why the procedure is recommended.



Hematologist

Hematologists specialize in treating diseases of the blood. Blood clots and clotting disorders are blood-related conditions, so you may see a hematologist as part of your care. A hematologist will often order tests to determine what's causing your clots and will help you choose the right treatment to lower your risk of having another clot.

If you take a blood thinner, you may be asked to follow up with your hematologist regularly. Many medical systems also have

anticoagulation clinics staffed by trained pharmacists. If you're taking a blood thinner like warfarin, then you may visit the anticoagulation clinic regularly for testing and dose adjustments, rather than going to your hematologist. Your PCP might also be responsible for managing your blood thinners.



Pulmonologist

A pulmonologist specializes in diseases of the lungs and other parts of the respiratory system. If you've experienced a pulmonary embolism (PE) and develop lung-related complications, you may need to see a pulmonologist to help manage these issues.



Cardiologist

A cardiologist specializes in treating diseases of the heart and other parts of the cardiovascular system. In certain situations, you might need to see a cardiologist after having a blood clot. For example, some abnormal heart rhythms cause blood to pool in the heart and therefore raise the risk of a clot. Treating these abnormal rhythms can help reduce the risk of a blood clot.

You may also need to see a cardiologist if a clot formed in a coronary artery (meaning that you



had a heart attack), or if a blood clot in your lungs damaged your heart.

Additional specialists



If your blood clot is thought to be caused or worsened by an underlying condition, you may need to see a different specialist entirely. For example, an endocrinologist specializes in treating hormonal conditions. If you have an autoimmune condition (in which your immune system is attacking your own tissues), you may need to see a rheumatologist.

How to find a physician who specializes in vascular care

In most cases, you won't need to do the work of finding specialists on your own. You'll usually get referrals from your PCP, or from your care team at the hospital or ED. The healthcare professionals in your community will generally be able to provide you with the best referrals because they have experience with lots of different specialists.

There may be situations where you're looking for a new specialist. For example, you might be unhappy with the care that you've received from a doctor and prefer to switch to a different one. In most cases, the best approach is to ask your PCP for a new referral.

If you're ever searching for a specialist on your own, it's best to look for a doctor who's board-certified in that specialty. The [American Board of Medical Specialties](#) has a website where you can search for a doctor's name and verify that they have board certification. You can try asking family and friends if they've had good experiences with a healthcare professional; however, personal or "word-of-mouth" recommendations can be a hit-or-miss approach since every patient's needs are different.

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Which specialist should I see?

To remove a blood clot from a vein or artery...



Vascular Surgeon or Interventional Radiologist

To treat blood-related conditions...



Hematologist

To manage lung-related complications...



Pulmonologist

To treat issues with the heart...



Cardiologist



Actionable steps

- If you have symptoms like redness, swelling, or pain in your arms or legs, make an appointment with your PCP right away. If you're experiencing **chest pain, difficulty breathing, a rapid heartbeat, lightheadedness or sudden weakness, numbness, or difficulty speaking**, go to the ED as soon as possible. Treating clots early is critical to prevent serious complications.
- If you've been treated in the hospital or ED for your blood clot, make an appointment to see your PCP a few days later. Your primary care team will help to coordinate your care.
- Ask your PCP or your care team at the hospital for referrals to the specialists that you need. Talk with them about why they're recommending certain specialists for you. Don't be afraid to ask for more information.
- Contact your PCP if you have any questions about your care plan.
- Be sure to stick with your recommended care plan. You may need medications to prevent future blood clots; make sure that you take those as directed for as long as your doctor prescribes them. Many people need these meds for 3 to 12 months after a clot, and some people need them for life. If compression stockings are recommended, wear them as directed.

TAKE ACTION



Learn the Symptoms

Chest pain, difficulty breathing, rapid heartbeat, lightheadedness, sudden weakness, numbness, and difficulty speaking are symptoms that require urgent medical attention.



Follow Up

After blood clot treatment, make an appointment with your PCP.



Seek Out Specialists

Speak with your PCP about specialists you may need.



Ask Questions

Don't be afraid to ask your PCP about your care plan.



Stick to Your Plan

Be sure to follow the care plan that your healthcare team puts together for you.



Introducing the CAT* Patient Toolkit: New Resources on Blood Clots and Cancer

*CAT stands for cancer-associated thrombosis

Blood clots are a known complication in cancer patients

If you consider everyone with a blood clot today, roughly 20% of those people have cancer. Cancer is a strong risk factor for developing a blood clot, and certain types of cancers (such as stomach cancers) are more strongly associated with clots. Some chemotherapy and

radiation treatments also increase the risk of blood clots. Sadly, thrombosis is the second leading cause of death in patients with cancer.

Despite a known link between blood clots and cancer, there is still a lack of awareness about thrombosis risk in patients with cancer. To help address this knowledge gap and encourage open conversations between

patients and healthcare providers, NATF has developed an online toolkit for patients that includes several resources, such as the *TRAC: Thrombosis Risk Assessment Checklist*, as well as videos and research summaries.

You can find these materials on the NATF website at www.thrombosis.org/patients/cancer-toolkit/.

Upcoming Patient Events

Support Group for Newly Diagnosed Patients

Hosted by Joelle Hochman, RRT, Chair of Patient Engagement and Education

We're pleased to offer a virtual support group experience specifically for patients who've recently had a blood clot.

February 9, 2023

March 16, 2023

April 20, 2023

May 18, 2023

*** All meetings start at 7:00 PM EST**



NATF Support Group

This virtual support group is designed for patients at all stages of their blood clot journey. If you had your blood clot 20 days ago or 20 years ago, we welcome you to join us!

February 15, 2023

March 15, 2023

April 11, 2023

May 16, 2023

June 13, 2023

*** All meetings start at 7:00 PM EST**

*This group is primarily geared towards patients who've had a blood clot in the past 12 months – but participants at any stage of diagnosis are welcome! If you're a longtime reader of *The Beat*, please help us spread the word about this support group! More information can be found on our website.



To register for these programs, please visit Patient Events on our website at <https://thrombosis.org/events/patients/>



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through education

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