



Fighting blood clots through education

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THE Beat

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Fact vs. Fiction: Exercising After a Blood Clot

Having a blood clot can affect almost every aspect of your life, and one of the most frequently asked questions is: “when is it safe to exercise after my clot?”

While it’s always best to get personalized advice from your own medical team, we can offer some guidance – and bust some persistent myths. Here’s what you should know about returning to exercise after a blood clot.

Staying active to prevent future clots

Immobility is a known risk factor for blood clots, meaning that people who stay still for a long period of time, such as after a surgical procedure or a major injury, are at a higher risk for clots. With that in mind, it’s important to begin increasing the circulation in your legs as soon as you can after you’ve had a blood clot.

However, for many people, returning to exercise after a blood clot may seem challenging or overwhelming. If you’ve had a blood clot in your leg (deep vein thrombosis or DVT), you may be having some residual

pain or swelling. If your clot was in your lung (a pulmonary embolism or PE), you may find yourself getting short of breath much more easily than before your clot. In either situation, start where you are – do whatever you can do, even if that’s just a few minutes of slow walking. Over time, as your body recovers from the clot, you’ll likely find that you can do more and build up moderate exercise. (Moderate exercise means that you’re just a little out of breath during the activity – a good rule of thumb is that you can talk but singing would be difficult.)



But...will I dislodge a blood clot if I exercise?

Many people worry that if they exercise after a DVT, a piece of the clot will break off, move to the lungs, and potentially cause a life-threatening PE. This is a persistent myth. In fact, [evidence](#) shows that exercising after a blood clot is generally safe. We know that exercise helps prevent future clots, so you shouldn't feel that you need to avoid exercise due to a fear of dislodging a clot.

Can exercise prevent post-thrombotic syndrome?

Post-thrombotic syndrome, or PTS, is a complication that can occur after a blood clot in the leg. It's thought to happen when the clot causes a lack of blood flow through the veins in the area. PTS can lead to long-term symptoms even after the blood clot itself is gone; these symptoms may include swelling, pain, changes in skin color, and a feeling of heaviness in the affected limb. Some people with PTS may experience skin wounds that don't heal.

Some research has shown that exercising after a blood clot helps prevent PTS. There aren't many studies on exercise and the risk of PTS, but the [evidence](#) that we have so far indicates that an exercise program after a blood clot can reduce the risk of PTS. It's believed that exercise helps to restore blood flow through the area, which in turn reduces the tissue damage that leads to PTS. Another reason to feel more confident about exercising after a clot!

Can I exercise if I'm taking an anticoagulant (blood thinner)?

People can absolutely exercise while on blood thinners. In fact, it's generally encouraged. If you're prescribed oral blood thinners or shots, you can start doing moderate exercise within a few hours of your first dose. If you're on IV anticoagulation, you may need to wait a little longer – about 24 hours.

It is true that you're at an increased risk for bleeding if you're on a blood thinner, so you'll want to carefully weigh what type of exercise to do. The good news is that there are often steps you can take to reduce the risk of falls or injury. For example, you might choose to use hiking poles to help you keep your balance, or ride a stationary bike instead of a regular bike. It is generally recommended that people on blood thinners avoid high-contact activities, like martial arts or skiing, since these activities could cause injuries that result in serious bleeding. Your healthcare team can help you find safer alternatives.

If you do fall or sustain an injury while exercising, check in with your doctor as soon as you can.



Do you like what you see in *The Beat* and find this information helpful?

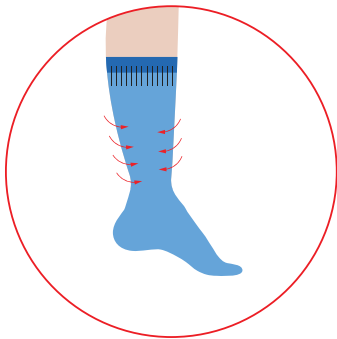
Please consider making a [donation](#) to NATF to further support blood clot education.

For anyone on a blood thinner, it's best to take any type of injury more seriously than you might otherwise. This is especially important if you bumped your head because bleeding in the skull can be extremely dangerous.

Should I wear compression stockings during exercise?

Compression can be very helpful in preventing blood clots. By putting pressure on an area, a compression garment (such as a stocking or sleeve) helps prevent blood from pooling in that area.

Many people choose to wear compression stockings while sitting for long periods, such as on an airplane, during a long car trip, or



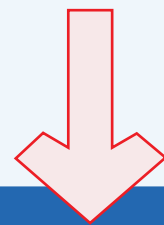
while at their desk all day, and doing so [can reduce](#) the risk of blood clots. Compression can also be helpful during exercise, especially for people who experience discomfort related to the effects of the clot. If you're having symptoms like pain and swelling while you exercise, consider wearing compression stockings or sleeves to help get some relief.

The bottom line: Exercise is important—and generally safe—after a blood clot

Exercise has huge benefits for your mental and physical health, and after a blood clot, exercise is key to help prevent future clots. Try to incorporate moderate exercise into your life on most days, and make sure that you're moving around at least once every hour whenever possible. If you're taking a blood thinner, take extra caution to prevent injuries – but don't let fear of bleeding stop you from exercising.

Above all, remember to listen to your body and to give yourself some grace. Exhaustion and fatigue are normal symptoms after a clot, so be kind to yourself and rest when you need to. For the first couple of months after your clot, you might not feel like yourself; you might feel like resting is all you can do, and that's okay because that's part of the recovery process. Just know that when you're ready to start exercising again, you can do so safely!

Need help getting started? See our beginner-level walking program below.



Beginner walking program

Try to choose a route that's close to home, relatively flat, and has plenty of places to rest along the way. For example, a local park or shopping mall.

Warm up by walking slowly for 5 minutes.

Week	1	2	3	4	5
Walk	5min	10min	20min	30min	40min
Daily	3-4x	3-4x	3x	2x	1x



Your goal is to work up to walking for 30-45 minutes 5-7 days per week.

Cool down by walking slowly for 5 minutes.

Improving Blood Clot Care Through Better Communication

NATF is excited to announce a new project in the works, *Optimizing VTE Communication: A Toolkit for Healthcare Professionals and Their Patients*. Venous thromboembolism or VTE, better known as blood clots in the veins, requires immediate medical attention – but there are often communication-related challenges in the emergency room or urgent care setting that can make it hard for patients and families to understand and process a blood clot diagnosis.

Spearheaded by Dr. Erik Klok, Professor of Medicine, at Leiden University Medical Center in the Netherlands, Dr. Grégoire Le Gal, Professor of Medicine at the University of Ottawa in Canada, and Dr. Scott Woller, Chair of Medicine at the Intermountain Medical Center in Utah, this project is the first of its kind to bring together a global taskforce of clinicians, communication experts, mental health experts, and patients to address the critical issue of patient-clinician communication at the point of VTE diagnosis and beyond. Together, our taskforce members bring perspectives from six different continents and represent more than 10 different medical and research specialties.



[A recent study](#) from the University of Indianapolis identified three factors that negatively influenced the patient experience at the point of VTE diagnosis in the emergency room:

- **Clinician word choice:** The use of medical terms, metaphors, and “alarmist language” (e.g., “you’re a ticking time bomb”) contributed to anxiety and distress.
- **Nonverbal cues:** Clinicians’ facial expressions often heightened patients’ concerns, along with the number of clinicians that entered and exited the room without directly addressing the patient or caregiver(s).
- **Incomplete information:** Patients reported that they were unclear on their diagnosis at every level, from the basic definition of VTE to their expected prognosis and how VTE would impact their lifestyle and day-to-day activities.

To help ease the burden on both clinicians and patients, we are creating a unique resource that will include:

1. A set of best practices and recommendations for clinicians focused on how to communicate a blood clot diagnosis and what information to communicate when in an emergency room or urgent care setting.
2. A complementary toolkit to support patients at the time of VTE diagnosis as well as in the first 3-6 months of their blood clot journey. Resources will include a comprehensive Q&A about VTE, a glossary of medical terms, information on VTE treatment, lifestyle considerations, and mental health, and materials to help support open conversation and shared decision-making between patients and clinicians.

Effective patient-clinician communication [is associated](#) with better health outcomes and greater levels of patient satisfaction. It is our hope that with the creation of these resources, we can make VTE information more accessible to clinicians, patients, and caregivers – and ultimately improve patient outcomes after a blood clot diagnosis.

Looking for current resources on navigating a blood clot diagnosis? Check out [Is This Normal?!](#) and our [Thrombosis Tips page](#) for answers to common questions about life after a blood clot.



Scan the QR code to access important website links



Save the Date: October 13th is World Thrombosis Day!

Join us!



[World Thrombosis Day \(WTD\)](#) is an international campaign dedicated to raising awareness about blood clots and draws attention to the signs, symptoms, and risk factors associated with clots. WTD is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, and NATF is thrilled to partner with the WTD team to help educate patients, families, and clinicians and about blood clots.

The theme for this year's campaign is *Move Against Thrombosis*. Sitting for extended periods of

time without moving can cause blood to pool in the veins and may lead to blood clots. By simply moving once an hour, you can lower your risk for clots.

We are excited to join forces with this wonderful organization to help educate the world about thrombosis. If you live near the Greater Boston area, come visit NATF on WTD! We'll be onsite at Brigham and Women's Hospital to partake in this educational event.

October 13, 2023
10:00 AM – 1:00 PM EST
Brigham and Women's Hospital
75 Francis Street, Tower Building



WORLD THROMBOSIS DAY
13 OCTOBER

Can't join us in person?

We will also be part of WTD's conversation on X, formerly known as Twitter. Log on at 12:00 PM EST and use the hashtag #clotchat

Our X handle is
@NATFthrombosis

Upcoming Patient Events

Support Group for Newly Diagnosed Patients

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

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

October 19, 2023

November 16, 2023

December 21, 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.



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!

October 11, 2023

November 9, 2023

December 5, 2023

All meetings start at 7:00 PM EST

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



Fighting blood clots
through education

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