

# Myeloma and the risk of blood clots

## Information for myeloma patients

Myeloma is a complex condition and may increase the risk of developing blood clots. These blood clots can develop in the veins of the legs, where they are called deep vein thrombosis (DVT), or can be found in the blood vessels of the lungs, where they are known as a pulmonary emboli (PE). Although less common, blood clots can occur in any other part of the body.

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### Why does myeloma increase the risk of blood clots?

There are a number of reasons for this. These include:

- **Myeloma itself**

Patients with myeloma produce and release certain chemicals that can stimulate the body's clotting ability.

- **The medicines used to treat myeloma**

The medicines we use to treat myeloma can increase the chances of developing blood clots. The risk of developing clots varies depending on the types of medicines given. Your myeloma doctor will explain if the medicines you are prescribed increase your risk.

- **Being less active**

During the initial phases of your myeloma treatment you might feel tired and weak. Being less active can reduce blood flow in the legs and can increase your chance of developing blood clots.

### What are the symptoms of a blood clot?

The common symptoms of a blood clot are persistent pain or cramp in the deep muscles of the leg that are unexplained. Occasionally some patients develop redness and swelling in the leg which may be just in the calf or involve the whole leg.

If the clot has moved to your lungs, known as a pulmonary embolism (PE) the symptoms can include:

- Feeling breathless, which may start suddenly or increase gradually
- Having pain in your chest or upper back, which is worse when breathing in
- Coughing up blood
- Feeling lightheaded.

## **Reducing the risk of blood clots**

Most patients with myeloma will not develop blood clots. The risk of developing blood clots appears to be higher in the first few months of starting treatment. Before you start myeloma treatment, your doctor will assess your risk of developing blood clots and consider whether you might benefit from having a preventative medicine. The preventative medicine does not provide 100% protection against blood clots, but will lower the risk of these developing.

There are three main types of clot-preventing medicines that may be considered for you, depending on your individual risk. They are:

- Apixaban (a tablet medication, taken twice a day with or without food)
- Enoxaparin (a medication which is injected once a day into the tummy area)
- Aspirin (a tablet medication, taken once a day with food)

## **What can you do to reduce the risk of blood clots?**

Remember to:

- Take short walks as often as possible
- Do simple leg exercises like bending and straightening your toes every hour if you can't move around much
- Drink plenty of water
- Report any symptoms to your doctor or nurse straightaway.

## **How long do you need to take the blood clot preventative medicine for?**

The length of time varies from patient to patient. It will depend on your individual risk and response to treatment. Some patients need to take it for six months and then stop. Some patients continue for longer. Sometimes, you may start off with one type of clot prevention medication and then be swapped to another type after six months. Your myeloma team will continue to check how long you need to be on the clot prevention medication for.

## **What are the risks of taking clot-prevention medicines?**

The risk of bleeding will be increased when you are on an anticoagulant (apixaban and enoxaparin), or antiplatelet drug (aspirin). Most people taking these have no bleeding problems but occasionally it can be serious.

You should seek medical help straight away if you have bleeding, especially if you have any of the following:

- coughing or vomiting blood
- black stools or blood in your stools
- severe, persistent headache, dizziness or weakness
- fall or injury to your head or face
- blood in your urine
- unexplained or severe bruising
- persistent nose bleeds
- other unexpected or uncontrollable bleeding.

If you have any concerns about these risks, your myeloma doctor, nurse or pharmacist will discuss these with you in more detail.

## **What else do you need to know?**

- To reduce your risks of bleeding during surgery, minor procedures or dental work, please tell your doctor or dentist which medicines you are taking
- Activities with a high risk of injury, such as contact sports, are best avoided while you are on a drug that could increase the risk of bleeding
- The myeloma team will give you an alert card if you are prescribed enoxaparin or apixaban. Carry this in your wallet or purse to make sure people know you are taking an anticoagulant.

## **How do I find out more about blood clots?**

Ask your myeloma doctor, clinical nurse specialist or pharmacist for more information, in the first instance.

You can also visit the Thrombosis UK website for further information: [www.thrombosisuk.org](http://www.thrombosisuk.org)

## **What if I have further questions?**

Your myeloma team will be happy to discuss any concerns with you.

## **Sharing your information**

We have teamed up with Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals in a partnership known as King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas'. To make sure everyone you meet always has the most up-to-date information about your health, we may share information about you between the hospitals.

## **Care provided by students**

King's is a teaching hospital where our students get practical experience by treating patients. Please tell your doctor or nurse if you do not want students to be involved in your care. Your treatment will not be affected by your decision.

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

PALS at King's College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London SE5 9RS:

Tel: 020 3299 3601

Email: [kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palsdh@nhs.net)

PALS at Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough Common, Orpington, Kent BR6 8ND.

Tel: 01689 863252

Email: [kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.palspruh@nhs.net)

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