

Health Tips

Your Good Health Information From eDocAmerica

with

Dr. D



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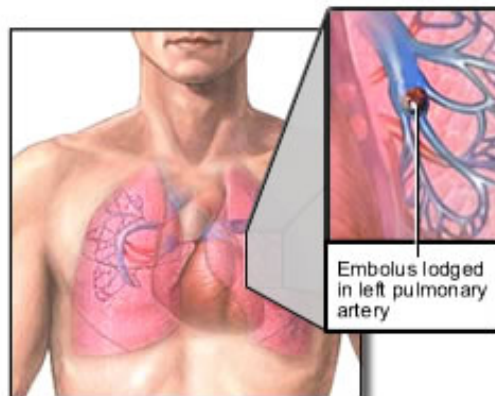
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Health Tip: All Blood Clots are not Created Equal Part 2- Pulmonary Embolism and Ischemic Stroke

Last week, we learned that all blood clots were not equal in terms of their potential for causing serious problems. A deep venous thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot that forms in the veins of the lower leg and, when addressed promptly, can be successfully treated without serious complications. Blood clots are also involved in the development of pulmonary embolism (PE) and stroke. A pulmonary embolism is caused from blockage of an artery in the lungs and a stroke from blockage of an artery in the brain. Either of these problems has a greater likelihood of causing serious consequences or death than the DVT. Let's look at these conditions in more detail.

Pulmonary embolism: In layman's terms, this is a blood clot in the lungs. The word embolism means that the clot has traveled to the lungs from somewhere

else and has become lodged in an artery. In most instances, this "somewhere else" is from a clot in the deep veins of the lower extremities (DVT). This is why, as was mentioned last week, it is so important to recognize this type of clot early on and institute appropriate treatment. More rarely, air bubbles, fat droplets or tumor cells may obstruct the pulmonary vessels. Depending on the size and location of the



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pulmonary embolus, complications include sudden death, abnormal heart rhythms, shock, or death to a portion of the lung.

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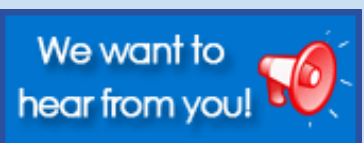
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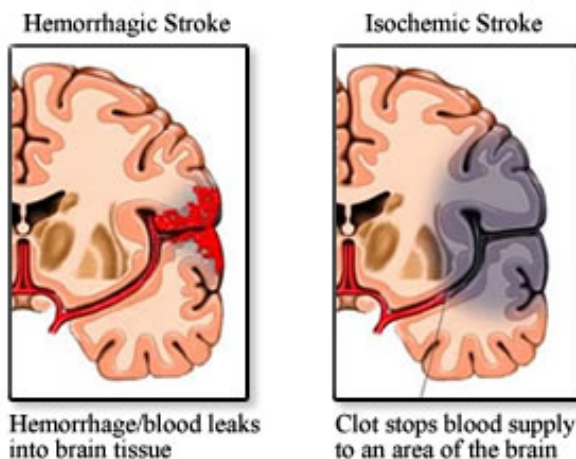


The risk factors for PE are, for the most part, similar to those that can cause a DVT. Prolonged bed rest or inactivity (including long trips in planes, cars, or trains), oral contraceptive use and surgery (especially pelvic surgery) are the most likely causes. Symptoms of pulmonary embolism include:

- Rapid breathing and heart rate
- Sudden onset of shortness of breath
- Chest pain, particularly when taking a deep breath
- Cough, which may begin suddenly or be associated with bloody sputum

The diagnosis and treatment of pulmonary embolism is beyond the scope of this brief review, but most of those who experience this problem will require hospitalization and emergency treatment. The use of oxygen therapy, anticoagulant medication (blood thinners) and, in severe cases, clot-dissolving medication, are the most effective forms of treatment. The death rate from an undiagnosed pulmonary embolism can be as high as 30%.

Ischemic Stroke: A stroke is an interruption of the blood supply to the brain.



Most strokes are considered to be "ischemic" strokes, meaning that they develop when a blood clot blocks an artery in the brain. The other major type of stroke is called a "hemorrhagic" stroke and occurs when a blood vessel in the brain leaks or ruptures.

The clots that cause ischemic strokes can develop either in an area of damage from cholesterol buildup (thrombus)

or can travel to the brain from somewhere else (embolus). The primary source for these emboli is the heart, occurring with conditions such as congestive heart failure and atrial fibrillation. When ischemic clots occur, they deprive the brain cells of oxygen and nutrients. Within minutes, brain cells can begin to die. It is important to learn the signs and symptoms of stroke. Outcome is directly related to the speed that treatment is begun.

- Sudden numbness or weakness of the face, arm or leg, especially on one side of the body
- Sudden confusion, trouble speaking or understanding
- Sudden trouble seeing in one or both eyes
- Sudden trouble walking, dizziness, loss of balance or coordination
- Sudden, severe headache with no known cause

A stroke, sometimes referred to as a "brain attack" is a medical emergency. Treatment varies, depending on the severity and cause of the stroke. In most cases hospitalization is required. The brain injury following a stroke can permanently affect the senses (such as eyesight, touch, awareness of body positioning), motor activity (movement of arms or legs), speech and the ability to understand speech.

While none of the types of blood clots discussed (DVT, pulmonary embolism, stroke) can be considered to be benign problems, clearly some are worse than

others. In each instance, however, early recognition of the problem and prompt treatment improves the outcome.

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