

# Thrombosis shouldn't be taken lightly

13 October 2014

Venous thromboembolism isn't as well known as stroke or heart attack, but this cardiovascular foe can be just as deadly.

It's a condition that includes the formation of a blood clot in a deep vein typically in the leg or pelvic veins ([deep vein thrombosis](#)) and pulmonary embolism which results if a clot dislodges and travels to the lungs. There are up to [600,000 cases annually](#) in the United States and a 30 percent mortality rate if left untreated.

Raising awareness of dangers of thrombosis is the goal of this year's international observance of World Thrombosis Day set for Oct. 13, 2014.

"Thrombosis, whether occurring in an artery or a vein, is often preventable and treatable with medications, delivered orally, subcutaneously, intravenously or locally using specialized catheters that can also be employed to physically extract the blood clot," says Richard Becker, MD, director and physician-in-chief of the UC Heart, Lung and Vascular Institute.

"From a [public awareness](#) perspective we have done a good job of teaching the signs and symptoms of [heart attack](#) and stroke," says Becker. "We must work harder with deep [vein thrombosis](#). Common signs include relatively sudden or progressive pain, redness and swelling of one leg or the other.

"For pulmonary embolism, a blood clot has traveled to the lungs and chest discomfort, typically worsening with a deep breath, and shortness of breath is apparent," says Becker. "Occasionally there is a sudden loss of consciousness," says Becker.

"Most people who are diagnosed with a blood clot in the leg have had symptoms for weeks," he says. Similarly with [blood clots](#) to the lungs, it is rare that somebody recognizes it right away. This is potentially life threatening and people come in days or weeks after initial symptoms.

"It is typical they have had a series of blood clots to the lungs and they are short of breath long before they realize that something is wrong and seek out medical attention," says Becker. It is our hope that raising public awareness will lead to early diagnosis and treatment.

Venous thromboembolism can be inherited or acquired following an accident, surgery or condition that causes immobility for days or weeks at a time, says Becker. Pregnant women may also experience deep vein thrombosis or pulmonary embolism.

According to the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis, patients going into the hospital for surgery can be proactive by asking the following questions:

- What is my risk for a blood clot?
- Should I receive some type of prevention for blood clots while I'm in the hospital?
- Should I also receive some type of prevention for blood clots once I'm discharged from the hospital and for how long?

"Age is known to be a risk factor for having deep vein thrombosis and [pulmonary embolism](#) along with stroke and myocardial infarction," says Becker. "They are all defined by a common theme, and that is blood clotting in an area where it is not needed. We all must be able to quickly form blood clots, particularly if you cut yourself or you are in an accident. However, these are blood clots that don't have any protective role whatsoever."

Blood thinning medications and other treatments can help prevent blood clots.

Becker said that while many physicians in the United States are aware of the threat of [venous thromboembolism](#), there is still work to be done. In addition, the seriousness of the condition is only now beginning to be understood in China, India, Southeast Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and Russia.

"The reason it is called World Thrombosis Day is because this is a worldwide health concern," says Becker. "The incidence is high and, in many instances, it is preventable, diagnosable and treatable."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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