

 <p><i>An initiative of the ABIM Foundation</i></p>	  
--	--

Treating acute blood clots

When you need a special device implanted—and when you don’t

A deep blood clot in your leg or pelvis may be dangerous. It can travel to your lungs and block the flow of blood. This can be deadly.

A deep blood clot is called a deep vein thrombosis, or DVT. When it travels to the lungs, it can cause a blockage called a pulmonary embolism, or PE.

If you have a deep blood clot or a high risk for clots, your doctor may recommend an inferior vena cava (IVC) filter. A specialist puts the filter into your body’s largest vein, in the abdomen. The filter is shaped like a tiny umbrella, to catch and stop clots from traveling from the lower body to the lungs.

But most patients don’t need filters. Here’s why:

Filters don’t work better than blood thinners alone.

Studies show that IVC filters don’t work better than blood thinners alone to prevent death. Blood thinners are also called “anticoagulants.”

Filters have risks.

Usually, filters should be removed as soon as the danger of a pulmonary embolism passes. But often, this doesn’t happen, partly because patients and doctors do not always follow up after a procedure.



If the filter stays in your vein, it may get clogged. This can lead to a blood clot in your leg.

In rare cases, the filter or pieces of the filter move to other parts of the body. This can lead to complications and the need for surgery.

Filters and follow-up can be costly.

It costs \$3,000 or more to put in a filter. Blood thinners cost about the same. However, removing a filter can cost an extra \$2,000 or more. If you have complications, your costs can go up a lot. You may have to pay for medicines, visits to the doctor, and hospital stays. And you may miss work during treatment.

Who might need an IVC filter?

You may need an IVC filter if you have a deep blood clot and cannot safely take blood thinners. For example, you may need an IVC filter if you have a bleeding disorder or if you are having life-threatening bleeding at the time of treatment.

The filter should be removed as soon as the risk of pulmonary embolism or bleeding is over and it is safe to use blood thinners.

Advice from Consumer Reports

Blood clots—symptoms and prevention

Blood clots in the deep veins and the lungs are serious. They are often missed. You can get them at any age. A clot in the lungs can cause severe illness and disability, even death.

You should get medical care immediately if you have a clot. That's why it is important to know the symptoms.

Symptoms of deep vein blood clots:

- Swelling, pain, tenderness, and redness or discoloration of the lower leg.
- A clot can sometimes form in the arm, with similar symptoms.

Get medical help right away if you have these symptoms.

Symptoms of a blood clot in the lungs:

A pulmonary embolism (PE) is a blood clot that travels to the lungs and blocks blood flow.

Symptoms include:

- Trouble breathing, rapid or irregular heart-beat, chest pain, pain when taking a deep breath, coughing up blood, and fainting.

If you have these symptoms, call 911 or go to the emergency room right away.

Preventing deep vein blood clots:

- Get regular exercise and lose extra weight.
- If you're on a long trip, drink fluids, limit salty snacks, and wear loose clothing. Get up to stretch your legs every hour or so. If you can't get up, shift positions and move your legs and feet often.
- If you can't move because you are in the hospital or had surgery, you might have a higher risk of a clot. Talk to your doctor about ways to prevent blood clots.



This report is for you to use when talking with your health-care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

© 2014 Consumer Reports. Developed in cooperation with the American Society of Hematology. To learn more about the sources used in this report and terms and conditions of use, please visit ConsumerHealthChoices.org/about-us/.