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SHEDDING LIGHT ON CLOTS

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It is fairly well known now that when blood clots in our blood vessels, it is a potentially life threatening condition. And many people have lost their lives on the account of clots formation in the blood vessels.

For the most part this can be prevented.

How common is it?

Whereas in the past it was thought to be less common in Africa, we have lately seen a surge. Clots are more likely in Africa in people who have just had surgery, child birth and pregnancy. Globally it is estimated that up to 2 million people annually will develop this potentially life threatening condition.

What are they?

Blood is a thick fluid that has several components that would be prone to getting stuck inside our vessels but through complex well-coordinated mechanisms including naturally occurring blood thinners it is able to flow seamlessly through the vessels back and fro, up and down.

Clotting is a useful process designed to prevent one from bleeding to death should a blood vessel get opened up.

How do clots form?

Blood clots form when blood loses its fluidity and tends towards a partially solid state (gel-like) and gets stuck in parts of veins or arteries or plugs them.

There are three factors that contribute to clot formation. One, the fluidity of the blood, the thicker it gets the more likely to clot, and a number of things can lead to this. Two, the vessels through which the blood flows, damage to the vessel walls trigger clots formation, for example uncontrolled high blood pressure damages vessel walls. Three, the speed with

which the blood flows in the vessels, with sluggish flow the risk goes up, as in when one stays in one place for a long time without moving.

Where do clots form and move to?

The more deadly forms of clots are those that form in the deep veins of the legs, dislodge and move to the lungs (medical term is Pulmonary Embolism (PE). In the lung, these clots block arteries and prevent oxygen delivery to vital organs. Clots may plug a vessel in the brain (stroke), the intestines (causing part of the intestines to die off), the kidneys and limbs.

How deadly are clots?

When clots form inside the vessels the body often attempts to dissolve them naturally, they only become dangerous when the natural dissolution fails or delays. Clots plug vessels partially or completely and restrict blood flow, decrease oxygen levels in the blood, and spark off a whole cascade of events.

Large or multiple blood clots can be fatal.

How do you know you got a clot in the lungs?

Sudden shortness of breath that isn't caused by exercise, chest pain, palpitations (rapid heart rate).

And if the clot formed in the leg, the calf will feel sore, it may appear swollen, feel warmer and look red for those with light skins.

Who is at a risk?

There are several well-known risk factors that include but not limited to the ones we highlight here.

Those who have just had surgery especially surgeries that last many hours, child birth and pregnant.



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Pregnancy increases the pressure in the veins in your pelvis and legs. The risk of blood clots from pregnancy can continue for up to six weeks after delivery.

Age plays a part older than 40 increases the risk. Sitting in one place for long periods of time, such as when driving or flying. When your legs remain still for hours, your calf muscles don't contract. Muscle contractions normally help blood circulate.

Prolonged bed rest, such as during a long hospital stay, or paralysis. Certain Infections, currently those who develop the severe form of COVID 19 may form clots, with devastating effects.

Birth control pills (oral contraceptives) or hormone replacement therapy. Both can increase your blood's ability to clot.

Being overweight or obese. Being overweight increases the pressure in the veins in your pelvis and legs.

Smoking affects blood clotting and circulation, which can increase your risk.

Some forms of cancer increase substances in your blood that cause your blood to clot. Some forms of cancer treatment also increase the risk of blood clots.

Heart failure.
A personal or family history of clot formation. If you or someone in your family has had one you might be at greater risk.

Does the Covid 19 Vaccines cause clots?

The chances of developing a blood clot after receiving the AstraZeneca vaccine is very low,

from available data a handful do so for every one million people vaccinated. This unlikely event should not stop one from taking the vaccine. However, should any of the clot signs show up, urgent medical attention should be obtained.

The signs include: breathlessness; pain in the chest or stomach; swelling or coldness in a leg; severe or persistent headaches or blurred vision; or tiny blood/dark spots under the skin beyond the site of the injection.

How can they be prevented?

For those at high risk, blood thinners are prescribed by a health worker, other measures may include wearing leg compression stockings that help prevent clots forming in the deep veins of the legs.

Otherwise exercise, an active lifestyle, eating lots of fruits and vegetables (they contain natural blood thinners) helps.

How are they treated?

Prompt treatment is essential to prevent serious complications or death. Blood thinners are the most common treatment for a blood clot. While hospitalized an injection is used, a pill regimen when the patient is sent home.

Clot removal if you have a very large, life-threatening clot in your vessels, the doctors may remove it using a thin, flexible tube and wires threaded through the blood vessels.