

**Patient  
Information**

# Pulmonary Embolism

## Introduction

You have been asked to attend Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) at Cheltenham General Hospital or Gloucestershire Royal Hospital because it is suspected you may have a developing blockage in your lungs called a Pulmonary Embolism (PE). This leaflet will give you information about what this means and how you will be looked after.

## What is a Pulmonary Embolism (PE)?

A PE is a blockage of a blood vessel in your lungs. This is usually caused by blood clots that travel from the deep veins in your leg, known as Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). The blood vessels in the lungs are very small and are easily blocked when the clot becomes wedged. The clot may prevent blood travelling to that section of the lung.

## Why do people have a PE?

A PE can happen for a number of reasons, such as:

- periods of immobility caused by long travel journeys, illnesses or injuries
- following an operation
- pregnancy
- having severe pre-existing medical illnesses such as cancer
- having had a DVT or PE in the past
- taking a hormone-based treatment such as the contraceptive pill
- lifestyle factors i.e. obesity or smoking

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## How do you know if you have a PE?

There are many symptoms that could be caused by a PE such as:

- chest pain which is sharp and worse when you breathe in
- shortness of breath
- coughing
- feeling lightheaded or dizzy
- passing out

If you have some of these symptoms it could mean that you have a PE. However, sometimes these symptoms can be due to other problems such as infection. In order to be certain, we will collect details about your past history and your symptoms.

## Tests

After an examination, the nurses will arrange for you to have some tests to identify if you do have a PE. The tests may include:

- a chest X-ray
- a blood test called a D-dimer
- a Computed Tomography Pulmonary Angiography (CTPA) scan

The results of these tests will provide information which will determine the treatment you need.

## What is a CTPA Scan?

A Computed Tomography (CT) scanner is an X-ray machine which produces an image of a cross-section or a slice of the body. The scanner is a doughnut shape, about 2 feet thick, which you pass through on a couch. A narrow fan-shaped beam of X-rays is produced from inside and rotates in a complete circle around you. The X-rays pass through your body and are detected by electronic sensors.

For a CTPA scan, dye is injected through a cannula (thin tube) into a vein in your arm. This dye will travel through your blood system to the blood vessels in your lungs and make it easier to see if a clot is present.

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## Will I have a scan on my first visit to hospital?

It is rare to have a scan on your first visit; you will usually need to return for the scan appointment.

We may recommend that you need treatment such as a daily injection or a tablet. This will depend on the results of your blood test and examination. The treatment will help to prevent any blood clot dislodging or becoming bigger. The SDEC nurses will discuss this in more detail with you.

## If a PE is not diagnosed

Further tests may be necessary or you may be referred back to your GP.

## If a PE is diagnosed

After discussion with you, a decision will be made about what treatment is best. The nurses will then begin the treatment.

## Symptoms

If you feel unwell and start to suffer any of the following symptoms, please **dial 999** and state that you are under investigation for a PE:

- breathlessness
- dizziness
- chest pain
- coughing, especially if bringing up blood

## Patient Information

### Contact information

If you are worried or have any questions about the information in this leaflet, please contact:

#### **SDEC Gloucestershire Royal Hospital**

Tel: 0300 422 6677

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 11:00pm

Saturday and Sunday, 8:00am to 9:00pm

#### **SDEC Cheltenham General Hospital**

Tel: 0300 422 3618

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 8:00pm

#### **NHS 111**

Tel: 111

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### Making a choice

#### Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



#### Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

\* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling. 2011;84:379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>