

Patient Information

Phlebitis

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about phlebitis, its causes and how to try to prevent it.

What is phlebitis?

Phlebitis is the medical term for inflammation or irritation of the walls of the veins.

You may notice red or dark marks along one or more veins on your hand or arm. Sometimes these may look dry like a minor graze, or the veins may feel hard, tender or tight. The veins may also look sunken in some areas which may make it difficult to move your hand or arm as usual.

What causes phlebitis?

‘Chemical phlebitis’ is caused by antibiotics, chemotherapy or other medications that have been given into your vein.

‘Mechanical phlebitis’ is caused by the cannula (a thin tube inserted into the vein used to give medication). The cannula can irritate the walls of the vein.

Can phlebitis be prevented?

We try to prevent phlebitis by:

- Inserting a small cannula into a large vein to administer (give) your medications through.
- Diluting the medications with extra fluids so that they are not so strong.
- Flushing extra fluid through the vein to remove any traces of the medication.
- Using a heat pad to open up the vein.

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What can I do to help?

Things that increase the blood supply to the area help the most, such as:

- Soothing your skin using heat from a warm hot-water bottle or microwavable heat pad. These items should be covered to protect your skin. It should feel warm and comfortable.
- Raising your arm high (above the heart) then resting it there using a pillow for support.
- Massaging your skin using a moisturiser.
- Gentle repetitive stretching and exercises of the hand/arm if your veins feel tight.
- Self-refer to your local physiotherapist if you are having problems with moving or straightening your arm. The contact details for the Macmillan Next Steps Cancer Rehabilitation physiotherapist are at the end of this leaflet.
- Applying ibuprofen gel on unbroken skin to help with the pain and inflammation. You can buy this over the counter at any pharmacy, chemist or supermarket. Always follow the instructions in the package information leaflet.
- Your nurse or doctor may prescribe a cream or gel called Hirudoid®. A small amount of the cream/gel should be massaged into the affected area 2 to 4 times a day. Hirudoid® is a local anti-coagulant which, when applied to the skin, relieves pain and inflammation in addition to promoting healing. Always follow the instructions in the package information leaflet.

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Contact information

Please contact the **Acute Oncology Haematology Unit Helpline** if you have any concerns.

Tel: 0300 422 3444 (24hrs)

Macmillan Next Steps Cancer Rehabilitation: Physiotherapy Self-referral

Tel: 0300 421 6586

Email: nextsteps@ghc.nhs.uk

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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?

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* 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 Counseling, 2011;84: 379-85



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