

Cancer Screening in Patients with Venous Thrombosis

What is venous thrombosis?

Venous thrombosis is a blood clot that forms in the veins, usually of the legs, which can sometimes move into the lungs.

How is cancer related to clot?

Cancer increases the chance of blood clots but most people with blood clots do not have cancer.

Cancer that spreads quickly or grows rapidly has the highest chance of blood clots.

Things that increase clotting in cancer:

- Immobility - hospital admission
- Large tumors pressing on blood vessels
- Injury to blood vessels – surgery, large intravenous (IV) lines used for cancer treatment or antibiotics or transfusions
- Hypercoagulability (tendency to clot) – chemotherapy, cancer type and stage

Why don't we test everyone?

Although cancer can cause blood clots, we usually don't look for it because:

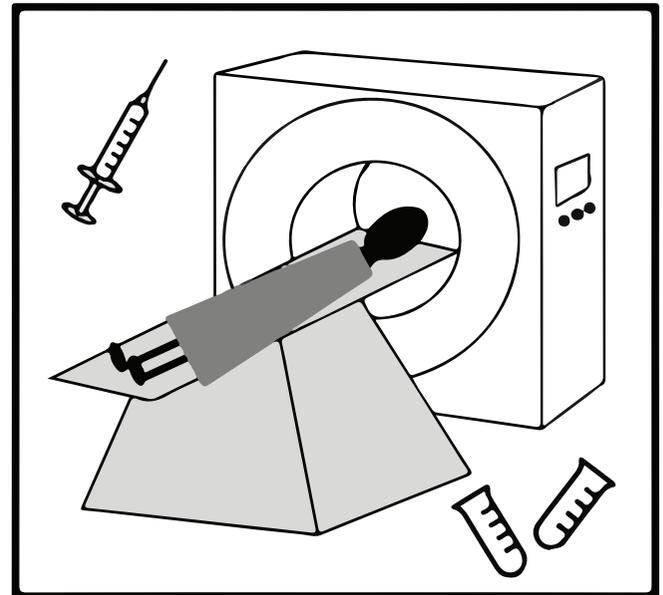
- The vast majority of people with clots do not have cancer
- Finding cancer in people with blood clots has not helped the cancer outcome
- Tests should cause as little harm as possible but, most cancer testing is invasive (biopsy or surgery), involves radiation and contrast of CT scanning and causes patient anxiety

Usually, testing shows no cancer.

Who should be screened?

There is no need for everyone to have cancer screening.

Some cancers can be screened for when you are over 50 years old or if you have other family members with cancer. Talk to your doctor for more information.



What if I have symptoms?

If you have unexplained symptoms (such as pain that is not getting better, blood in your stool, unexplained weight loss, fevers or drenching night sweats), contact your doctor.

Your doctor may choose to look for cancer if you have a clot PLUS symptoms that they feel may be related.

Take Away Message

- If you have no symptoms of cancer, screening for cancer is not useful even though cancer increases the risk of forming blood clots
- Many tests used to look for cancer can be harmful and invasive