



Thrombosis Canada

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# Cancer-Associated Thrombosis (CAT)

**Know your risk. Know the signs. Know what to do.**

## What is CAT?

The risk of developing blood clots may be increased when someone has cancer due to a number of factors relating to the cancer itself and its treatment. When a blood clot occurs in the context of cancer, it's referred to as cancer-associated thrombosis (CAT). A blood clot is a normal body process that helps stop bleeding after an injury, but sometimes clots form when they shouldn't and this can block blood flow in your blood vessels, and can cause potentially life-threatening problems.

## Why is CAT important?

CAT is a common problem for patients with cancer and patients need to know their risk as they may vary. Without proper management, CAT can cause significant disruption in a patient's cancer treatment (e.g. delay or suspension). Also, if left untreated, PEs may sometimes cause death.

## What can cause CAT?

Having cancer increases your risk of developing a clot and patients have the highest risk of CAT within the first three months of their cancer diagnosis. Below are some risk factors that can increase the probability of a blood clot:

Patient-related	Cancer-related	Cancer treatment-related
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Older age</li> <li>• Immobility</li> <li>• Obesity</li> <li>• Certain existing medical conditions</li> <li>• History of blood clots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitalization</li> <li>• Type of cancer</li> <li>• Severity or the stage of cancer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major surgery</li> <li>• Certain cancer treatments</li> <li>• Fixed catheter lines</li> </ul>

*Ask your doctor about your risk of developing CAT*

## How can I reduce my risk?

- Drinking plenty of liquids
- Getting up and walking frequently
- Not smoking

## What should I do?

If you have any of the below symptoms, go to the emergency room and seek medical care immediately!

## Treatment

- CAT is usually treated with anticoagulants that are in an injection form
- Treatment is usually long term, for at least 3-6 months
- Main side effect is bleeding
  - Minor (nose/gum bleeds, bruising)
  - Major (coughing blood, blood in vomit, urine or stool, black stool)
- Cancer patients may develop low blood platelet counts due to chemotherapy. During those times, patients are at increased risk for bleeding and the anticoagulant may be temporarily reduced in dose or stopped

## What are the symptoms of CAT?

### DVT

- Swelling of/or sense of heaviness in the leg or arm
- Pain, tenderness or cramping in the calf
- Redness, discolouration or warmth of the affected leg or arm

### PE

- Shortness of breath
- Chest pains with breathing
- Less commonly, feeling faint, light-headedness, dizziness, coughing up blood, upper back pain

## Take Away Message

- Cancer and its treatment increase your risk of developing a blood clot
- Recognizing the symptoms of a clot is important as clots can happen at any time
- If you have any symptoms of a DVT or PE, go to the emergency room and seek medical care immediately

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