

PULMONARY EMBOLISM

SYMPTOMS

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IMPORTANT

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A pulmonary embolism occurs when a blood vessel supplying the lung becomes occluded by a blood clot.

The clot may have travelled in the bloodstream from a vein (typically from the abdomen, the pelvis, or the leg) through the heart and into the lung. Moreover, a damaged heart can also be the cause/source of these clots.

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Symptoms of a Small Embolus

- The primary symptom is breathlessness, which often occurs suddenly and for no reason.
- Sudden pain in the chest.
- Cough.
- Rapid breathing.
- Rapid heart rate.
- Shortness of breath.
- Uncomfortable feelings, nervousness, and anxiety.
- Blood in phlegm that is coughed up.
- In the days following a pulmonary embolism, the individual may experience a slight fever and feel exhausted. However, the individual may begin to feel better, and the symptoms may disappear within two or more weeks.
- There is an increased risk of getting a new embolus after the first episode.

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Symptoms of a Large Embolus

- Sudden and rapid onset without any warning.
- The individual becomes pale and breaks out into a cold sweat.
- Unconsciousness may quickly follow.
- Without immediate emergency medical intervention, death may occur.

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Other General Symptoms Include:

- Anxiety.
- Bluish skin discoloration.
- Clammy skin.
- Dizziness.
- Leg pain in one or both legs.
- Lightheadedness or fainting.
- Low blood pressure.
- Lump associated with a vein near the surface of the body, may be painful.
- Nasal flaring.
- Pelvis pain.
- Sweating.
- Swelling in the legs.
- Weak or absent pulse.
- Wheezing.

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Possible Complications

- Sudden death.
- Heart failure or shock.
- Severe breathing difficulty.
- Heart palpitations.
- Pulmonary hypertension.
- Severe bleeding (typically a complication of treatment).

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Who are at risk of a Pulmonary Embolism?

Most individuals who develop a pulmonary embolism already suffer from some kind of existing disease, recent surgery, or heart condition.

However, other situations which may increase the risk of pulmonary embolism include:

- Family tendency or history to develop blood clots and/or pulmonary embolism.
- Elderly people - especially if they spend a lot of time in bed. Because of the risk of a pulmonary embolism, it is important that elderly people do not lie in bed more than is absolutely necessary. Consequently, those who have undergone surgery should try to gently walk around as soon possible, in accordance with their health professional's instructions.
- Burns
- Obese - being overweight does seriously increase the risk of pulmonary embolism.
- Cancer conditions dramatically increase the risk of pulmonary embolism. However, most individuals diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism do not have cancer.
- Pregnancy and childbirth can be causal in pulmonary embolism.
- Family history of blood clots.
- Pelvic fractures and fractures of the lower limb.
- Heart attack.
- Heart surgery
- Following surgery - especially abdominal surgery.
- Following surgery - especially orthopedic or neurological surgery.
- Long-term bed rest or staying in one position for a long time, such as a long plane or car journey. After/during a long journey, without moving around, the blood can clot in the legs where it will form a deep vein thrombosis (DVT), which may then migrate to the lungs and result in a pulmonary embolism.
- Severe trauma/injury.
- Stroke.
- Use of birth control pills or estrogen therapy.
- People with certain clotting disorders may also have a higher risk.

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