

Don't let a blockage stop you

Focus on pulmonary embolism



Pulmonary embolism is a blockage of one of the pulmonary arteries in your lungs, and they are usually caused by blood clots that travel to the lungs from the legs or (more rarely) from other parts of the body.

Although anyone can develop blood clots (also known as deep vein thrombosis) and pulmonary embolisms, factors such as immobility, cancer, and surgery increase the risk for this life-threatening condition. Taking prompt, proactive measures to prevent blood clots in your legs, particularly if you are already in the hospital, is the best way to prevent pulmonary embolisms.

Pulmonary embolism symptoms can vary greatly, depending on how much of your lung is involved, the size of the clots, and your overall health. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Shortness of breath, which appears suddenly and worsens with exertion
- Chest pain that may feel like a heart attack
- Coughing that sometimes produces bloody or blood-streaked sputum

Other signs and symptoms that can occur with pulmonary embolisms include:

- Leg pain or swelling, usually in the calf
- Clammy or discoloured skin
- Fever and excessive sweating
- Rapid or irregular heartbeat
- Light-headedness or dizziness

Pulmonary embolism can be difficult to diagnose, especially in people who have underlying heart or lung disease. It is often confused with asthma attacks, pneumonia, bronchitis, or heart attacks.

If your doctor suspects pulmonary embolisms, he can order a blood test to help rule it out as well as diagnostic imaging, including a CT scan of the lungs. And because nearly all patients with a pulmonary embolism have deep vein thrombosis, physicians should take precautions against the clot moving to the lungs.

Generally, if you feel that you are at risk for pulmonary embolism, you should immediately identify your concerns to your physician. And whatever you may experience that prompts these concerns, you should rest assured that you can always get an expert opinion on your diagnosis or treatment options.

As part of your Best Doctors benefits, an in-depth review of your medical case by our experts will give you an easy-to-understand report that either confirms your diagnosis and treatment or recommends a change. If you think you may have pulmonary embolism or be at risk for it, take advantage of Best Doctors, eliminate any blockages to your correct diagnosis, and plan for the best next steps.

The benefit of *removing the doubt*
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