What is a hypercoagulable state?

When a person has an abnormally strong tendency for the blood to thicken and clot, it is called a *hypercoagulable state*. It can be the result of environmental factors (such as the effects of hormones, surgery, or cancer), or it can be caused by an inherited defect in one of the molecules involved in blood clotting. Blood clotting problems like these are more likely to increase your risk of developing harmful blood clots in the deep veins of the legs (
deep vein thrombosis
or DVT) than blood clots in the arteries that can result in a
heart attack
or stroke. A blood clot or
thrombus
in the veins of the legs can break off and travel through the bloodstream to block an artery in the lungs, causing the life-threatening condition,
pulmonary embolism
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What causes blood clotting problems?

There are several causes for blood clotting problems. You are more prone to developing blood clots after surgery (especially hip or knee), or when you are immobilized for more than 4 days, or as a result of injuries from a severe accident. Cancer can also lead to a hypercoagulable state: 1% to 15% of cancer patients develop blood clots in their veins.

Some people have a higher risk of blood clotting problems because they inherit mutations (variations) in the genes for blood clotting proteins.

Hormones, including estrogen found in hormone therapy and birth control pills , can increase your risk of developing blood clots, especially if you have an inherited blood clotting disorder or have a history of unexplained blood clots.

Next: Inherited Blood Clotting Problems & Stroke

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