



Sarah's story

In January 2017, when I was 41 years old & was a smoker...

I was on the Pill since 2011. Prior to the Pill, I was on the pill injection from 2004-2011, but developed Osteopenia from it, so I stopped using that.

In January this year, one Sunday morning; I went down to Glendalough for a walk. It was a leisurely walk for a couple of hours, nothing too strenuous. On the Monday morning, I woke up with a pain in my right leg (calf) only. It felt like touching a bruise. There was no swelling or discolouration. I thought it was unusual that the pain was just in one leg only but I said I would wait til Wednesday to see if pain would be gone by then. If not, then I would go to the doctor. It was always on the back of my mind anyway; that being on the Pill carries a risk of DVT's.

By Tuesday, the pain was still there but not any better or worse. By Wednesday; I could feel the pain in my leg before I even stepped out of bed. Then when I got up, the pain was worse than the previous two days & I was limping down the stairs. I rang the Care doc & the nurse rang me back to ask me a few questions, as they do. Because I was on the Pill & a smoker; she said I had 2 main risk factors for a blood clot / DVT. She said for me to go straight into A&E & to explain to the hospital that they sent me in because I have 2 main risk factors for DVT/ blood clot.

I drove myself into A&E in St Vincent's Hospital. In Triage, the nurse asked me the required questions. She got a measuring tape & measured both of my legs around my calf. There was no swelling, no discolouration, no coolness / warmth to touch, no trauma or injury, hadn't been on a flight recently.

Then after that, I was assessed by the A&E Nurse / Doctor; he said that it was more than likely just muscular. He took my bloods, gave me pain killers & anti-inflammatories & told me to come back in a couple of hours when my bloods were back from the lab.

When the bloods came back; he called me in. He told me that my blood test (D-Dimer) results were slightly off & that he was going to send me for a Doppler ultrasound, as the blood test results don't give accurate enough information to confirm if there is a blood clot.

Got Doppler ultrasound done & waited for the results back in A&E. While I was waiting & still unsure if I had a clot or not; I was called in, to be brought off for a chest x-ray (to ensure clot wasn't travelling to my lung causing a PE).

Back down in A&E; the Nurse / Doctor called me back in to say that he was really surprised to discover that I actually had a blood clot/DVT. He sent me up to the Acute Medical Unit ward to be seen by a doctor & to be given medical advice on aftercare treatment for my DVT.

The AMU Doctor went through loads of questions about recent events, medical history, lifestyle, family medical history. I explained that I had a bug on the Friday & Saturday beforehand. I

mentioned that my cousin got a DVT from flying & I was unsure about any other family medical history of blood clots. I since found out that my cousin who got the blood clot after flying; has the gene for clotting (Factor V Leiden). Her sister also has the gene for clotting. Our Grandmother also got a blood clot in her leg many years ago. The doctor also gave me a breast check - I think this was to try & rule out cancer?

The doctor explained that my DVT was more than likely caused by the 2 main risk factors: Smoking & the Pill. It could also have been caused by dehydration (from the bug I had) & the way I cross my legs & If I have the Factor V Leiden gene for clotting. I stopped taking the Pill immediately & have stopped smoking. So if I have the gene for clotting & if that is the cause of another clot? But more than likely, this time it was caused by smoking & the Pill. The doctor was amazed that the clot was discovered so early, with such few symptoms presenting themselves & praised me for being so aware of the symptoms / risks associated with blood clots / DVT's. I was prescribed the anti-coagulant (blood thinners) medication, to be taken for 12 weeks in total. 15mg twice a day for the first 3 weeks, then 20mg once a day for the remaining 9 weeks. I was advised on how to take the medication (same time each day) & the risks involved (i.e. if cut yourself what to do, will bruise badly, to watch out if periods too heavy, what to do if forget to take one tablet, only 1 or 2 drinks on a night out, to carry a "patient alert card" around with me etc).

The medication (Xarelto) was fine to take. Just needed to take it at the same time each day (or within an hour). Just got one bruise, which was quite dark & took longer to heal. I didn't cut myself. My period was heavy, but no cause for concern. I wore a compression stocking for a few weeks until the pain was gone. I am now fully aware of the risks associated with Blood clots / DVT's & was glad of the knowledge I did have at the time; to be able to decide to go to the doctor & get it seen to.