



Your Guide To: Inferior Vena Cava (IVC) Filter



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What is inferior vena cava filter placement?

Inferior vena cava filter placement is surgery to place a filter into your inferior vena cava. The inferior vena cava, or IVC, is a large blood vessel found in your abdomen (stomach). It begins at your abdomen, and continues up to your heart, inside your chest. The IVC brings blood from the lower parts of your body back to your heart.

During the procedure, a catheter (thin plastic tube) is inserted into the blood vessels in your neck or groin. A doppler ultrasound or fluoroscope (x-ray) is used to guide the catheter into your IVC. The IVC filter is inserted through the catheter and into the IVC where it attaches to the walls of the vein. The catheter is pulled out after the procedure and the filter is left in.

What is an inferior vena cava filter?

An IVC filter is a specially shaped mesh made of very thin wires. It is placed in the center of the IVC to trap blood clots going to your heart. This helps prevent the blood clots from blocking blood vessels in your lungs and causing serious problems. The following are the types of IVC filters:

- **Permanent filters:** These filters are left firmly in the IVC and are not taken out.
- **Temporary or retrievable filters:** These filters can be removed from the IVC after a period of time. They may also be left permanently in the IVC depending on the person's condition. They have small hooks or knobs on one end so that they could be removed by caregivers. A special catheter with a hook is used to remove temporary IVC filters. Your caregiver will tell you when the IVC filter may be removed.

Why might I need an inferior vena cava filter placed?

You may need surgery to place an IVC filter when you have blood clotting problems. You may also need it if you are at risk of having blood clots, such as during pregnancy or surgery. You may also need it after trauma, such as a head injury or fractured pelvis. A filter may also prevent patients who have a history of deep venous thrombosis or pulmonary embolism from getting clots in their lungs. When medicine to thin the blood cannot be used, an IVC filter may be placed.

What is a pulmonary embolism?

A pulmonary embolism (PE) is a blood clot that develops in a blood vessel elsewhere in the body (most commonly from the leg), travels to an artery in the lung, and forms an occlusion (blockage) of the artery.

A blood clot (thrombus) that forms in a blood vessel in one area of the body, breaks off, and travels to another area of the body through the bloodstream is called an embolus. An embolus can lodge itself in a blood vessel, blocking the blood supply to a particular organ. This blockage of a blood vessel by an embolus is called an embolism.

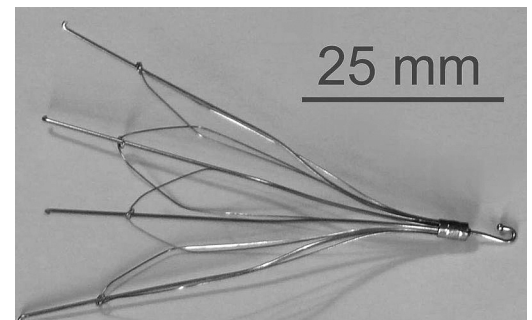
An embolism to the lung may cause serious life-threatening consequences and, potentially, death. Most commonly, a PE is the result of a condition called deep vein thrombosis (blood clot in the deep veins of the leg).

What is deep vein thrombosis (DVT)?

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when a blood clot develops in a vein deep in the body. Deep veins are found within groups of muscles. The veins close to the skin are called superficial veins.

While these clots most often develop in the lower legs or thighs, they may appear in the upper body, such as the arms or other locations in the body. Deep vein thrombosis is a risk for any major surgery, but patients who have surgery of the legs or hips are at higher risk.

Deep vein thrombosis can pose a serious threat to health. Pieces of a clot can break off and travel through the bloodstream to the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism and can be fatal soon after it occurs. Deep vein thrombosis can also block blood flow in the veins, causing the blood to pool. This can cause swelling, pain, and permanent damage to the leg called post-thrombotic syndrome.





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What are the risks of having an inferior vena cava filter?

There are risks with IVC placement surgery, including infection and bleeding. Blood clots may form and float elsewhere from the area where the catheter is inserted. Your IVC and the tissue around it may get damaged. Your IVC filter may break, loosen, change position, or get blocked. If there are problems with your filter, you may need to have more surgery. Even after IVC filter placement, blood clots may still appear and clog blood vessels. Ask your caregiver if you have any questions or concerns about your condition, treatment, or care.