

Weekly update from Woodchurch Surgery

It's always a busy time of year with two short weeks to fit the work into, joined this year by frequent updates from the JCVI (vaccine advisors) and MRHA (regulators) about the Covid jabs. There have been some reports of unusual blood clots that have occurred mainly within 2 weeks of receiving the first Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine although it is stressed that no causal link has been established.

In these people it seems that they have had a particular problem with their platelets which are little cells circulating in the blood that help us stop bleeding. Because of this the current advice is to avoid the AZ vaccine if people have a known problem with their platelets or a known condition that makes them bleed more or clot more. For some reason, the JCVI are recommending that people under 30 without a chronic illness are offered an alternative vaccine for the first dose even if an appointment has been made for it. This includes care workers who are under 30.

Everyone else should carry on as planned and the overwhelming advice is the vaccination poses much less of a risk than Covid does. The AZ vaccine is approved now to be given to people that cannot attend a vaccination centre to have the second Pfizer jab. Most commonly this will be for care homes where a resident had their first jab in hospital or for someone who has become debilitated since having their first vaccine.

Over half of the reported side effects from vaccinations have included a headache so it really is very common and fortunately not every headache is a clot. Recent vaccine or not - if you have any shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling, persistent abdominal pain, neurological symptoms, unusual bruising or persistent headache (for more than 4 days not responding to painkillers) then you should get medical advice.

During lockdown a lot of people bought blood pressure monitors and have been using them (any brand from a proper retailer). Having raised blood pressure doesn't usually make you feel any different and if left untreated can lead to heart disease, strokes, kidney failure and eye problems. Because eyes have some of our smallest blood vessels a thorough check up with an optician is also a really useful cardiovascular check up too.

When I first started training we were taught that blood pressure was age-related and age+100 for the top figure was acceptable. I'm told that the insurance companies realised they were paying out on people of all ages with apparently normal blood pressure and drove more research. It's now recognised that blood pressure should be the same for all adults to prevent complications regardless of age.

It's best to be relaxed and sat down while doing 3 readings noting the best of them. Blood pressure will change a little during the day, should be lower at night when resting and should average lower than 135/85 mmHg. The top figure represents the pressure your heart is exerting when it is squeezing (systole) and the bottom figure when your heart is relaxing (diastole). If your average readings are above 135 for systole or 85 for diastole then contact us routinely and we can look into it.

On a Grand National weekend blood pressure for a lot of people will be all over the place so don't measure it now. Keep up the confidence in the vaccination program and please only contact us if you have a clotting disorder otherwise carry on as planned.

Best wishes from us all at the Surgery, Jack Hickey - GP