Primary polycythaemia (high red blood cells)

Primary polycythaemia, also called primary polycythaemia vera or PV, is caused by your bone marrow making too many red blood cells.

Most people with polycythaemia remain well, but they do have a higher risk of getting blood clots. These can lead to deep vein thrombosis (DVT), pulmonary embolism, strokes, or heart attacks.

Sometimes, after many years people with polycythaemia can develop other blood problems, such as anaemia, scarring of their bone marrow (a condition called myelofibrosis), or even leukaemia.

Primary polycythaemia is diagnosed with a blood test. You may also need a bone marrow biopsy.

Treatment to lower your red blood cells to the normal level reduces your risk of blood clots. This is either done by regularly removing blood (called blood letting or venesection) or with medication.