A vena cava filter is a small metal device used to help prevent blood clots in the lungs called pulmonary embolism (PE). Blood clots can form in deep veins in the leg. If they break free, the clots can travel through the bloodstream to the lungs. Because the blood vessels (arteries) to the lungs are smaller, a clot blocks the flow of blood to the lungs. When the blood flow is blocked, the body does not get enough oxygen.

A filter is placed in a large central vein that returns blood to the heart called the vena cava. There are different types of vena cava filters. Your doctor will discuss with you whether a vena cava filter is an option and the type of filter that you will have inserted.

Conditions that may require a vena cava filter include:

- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT), in which blood clots form in the veins of the legs
- Hypercoagulation of the blood (too much blood clotting)
- Pulmonary emboli in the past

Patients with conditions that could result in a PE may be given medications called anticoagulants. These decrease clotting in the blood by “thinning” the blood, but do not dissolve any clots already present in the blood. Some patients cannot take anticoagulants.

How Is The Filter Inserted?
The doctor uses a catheter placed in a vein in the groin or neck and guides the filter into the vena cava. The site where it is inserted is numbed and you will be given medication to make you drowsy.

When the doctor releases the filter from the catheter, it opens up like an umbrella and lodges in place in the vena cava. Blood is able to flow around any clots that are caught in the filter. These will dissolve over time by natural enzymes released in the blood stream.

The filter will not:

- Limit your activity
- Set off metal detectors
- Prevent you from having an MRI
- Be rejected by the body

Your doctor may prescribe medication to prevent blood clots from forming because the vena cava filter does not prevent them.

The filter rarely becomes clogged by clots. If this does happen, leg swelling may occur. Contact your doctor right away if you have any new or unusual leg swelling.

Talk with your doctor about any questions or concerns.