

Deep Vein Thrombosis

What is a deep vein thrombosis (DVT)?

A DVT is a blood clot that forms in a deep vein of the body. The deep veins in the legs, thighs, and hips are the most common sites for DVT. A DVT can also occur in a deep vein within arms. The clot prevents the normal flow of blood in the vein. The blood backs up and causes pain and swelling. The DVT can break into smaller pieces and travel to lungs and cause a blockage called a pulmonary embolism (PE). A PE can become life-threatening.

What increases risk for a DVT?

- A family history of blood clots
- Limited activity caused by bed rest, a leg cast, or sitting for long periods
- Age older than 60 years
- Hormone replacement therapy
- Birth control pills, especially in women who smoke or are older than 35 years
- Injury to a deep vein, or surgery
- A blood disorder that makes blood clot faster than normal, such as factor V Leiden mutation
- Pregnancy, and for 6 weeks after childbirth
- Cancer or heart failure
- A catheter placed in a large vein
- Smoking cigarettes
- Obesity or varicose veins

What are the signs and symptoms of a DVT?

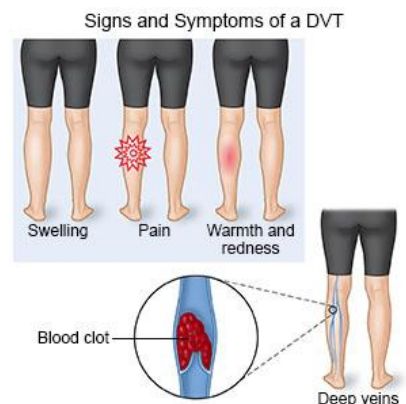
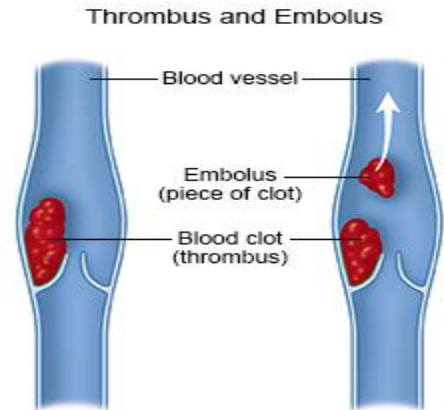
- Swelling
- Redness
- Warmth, pain, or tenderness

How is a DVT diagnosed?

- A **D-dimer blood test** may be done to check for signs of a blood clot.
- An **ultrasound** uses sound waves to show pictures on a monitor. An ultrasound may be done to show a clot in vein.
- **Contrast venography** is an x-ray of a vein.

How is a DVT treated?

- **Blood thinners** help prevent blood clots. Clots can cause strokes, heart attacks, and death. The following are general safety guidelines to follow while patient is taking a blood thinner:
 - Do not start or stop any other medicines unless doctor suggest to do so. Many medicines cannot be used with blood thinners.



- Take blood thinner exactly as prescribed by doctor. Do not skip doses or take less than prescribed.
- **Warfarin** is a blood thinner that patient **may** need to take.
 - Foods and medicines can affect the amount of warfarin in blood. Do not make major changes in diet while taking warfarin. Warfarin works best when patient eat the same amount of vitamin K every day. Vitamin K is found in green leafy vegetables and certain other foods.
- **A vena cava filter** may be placed inside vena cava to treat DVT. The vena cava is a large vein that brings blood from lower body up to heart. The filter may help trap pieces of a blood clot and prevent them from going into lungs.
- **Surgery** called a thrombectomy may be done to remove the clot. A procedure called thrombolysis may instead be done to inject a clot buster that helps break the clot apart.

What can I do to manage a DVT?

- **Wear pressure stockings as directed.** The stockings put pressure on legs. This improves blood flow and helps prevent clots. Wear the stockings during the day. Do not wear them when you sleep.
- **Elevate your legs above the level of your heart.** Elevate your legs when you sit or lie down, as often as you can. This will help decrease swelling and pain. Prop your legs on pillows or blankets to keep them elevated comfortably.



Pressure Stockings



How to prevent a DVT?

- **Exercise regularly to help increase blood flow.** Walking is a good low-impact exercise.
- **Change body position or move around often.** Move and stretch in seat several times each hour while traveling by car or work at a desk. Patient can move legs while sitting by raising and lowering heels. Keep toes on the floor while doing this. Patient can also raise and lower toes while keeping heels on the floor.
- **Maintain a healthy weight.**
- **Do not smoke.** Nicotine and other chemicals in cigarettes and cigars can damage blood vessels and make it more difficult to manage your DVT.
- **Ask about birth control if a woman who takes the pill.** A birth control pill increases the risk for PE in certain women. The risk is higher if you are also older than 35, smoke cigarettes, or have a blood clotting disorder.

Reference: Micromedex's Care Notes System Online 2.0