

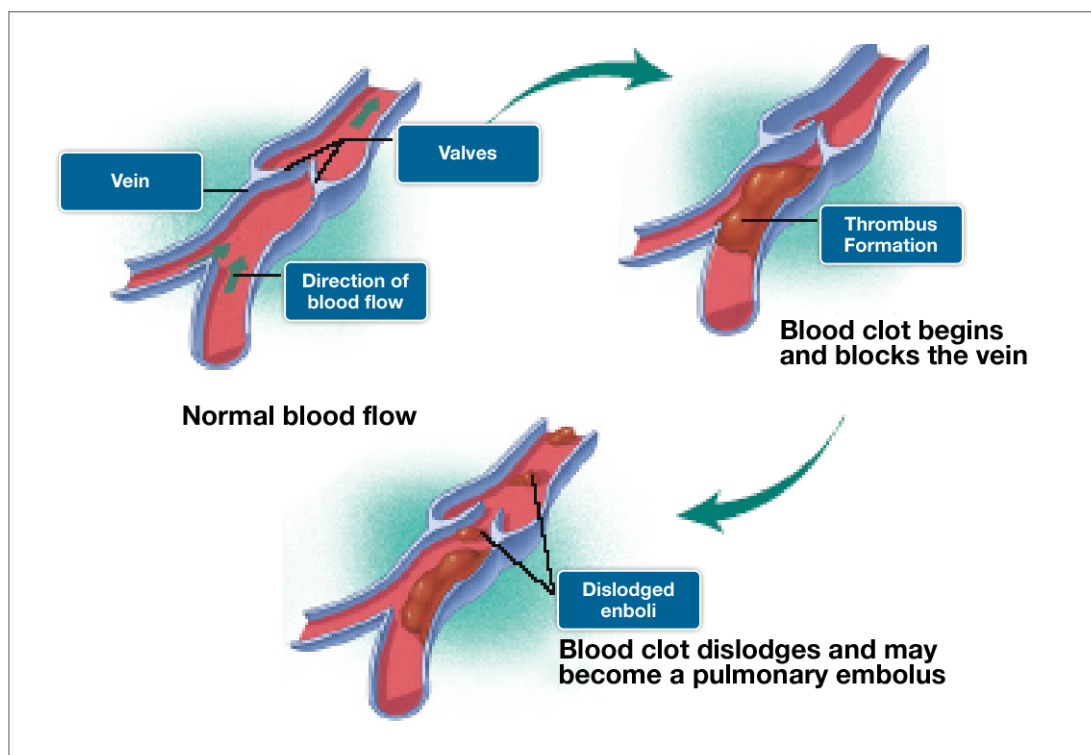
## What is Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

### Blood Clot

When blood changes from its normal liquid form into a solid or semi-solid form it is called a *blood clot*. When you cut your finger, the normal response is that a small blood clot (a “scab”) develops at the site of the cut to stop the bleeding. However, if a blood clot develops inside one of your veins, it can block the normal flow of blood and cause problems.

### What is Deep Vein Thrombosis?

The medical term for development of an abnormal blood clot is *thrombosis*. Thrombosis most commonly develops inside a deep vein of the leg and is called a *deep vein thrombus*. If all or part of a deep vein thrombus breaks loose, it can travel from the leg to the lungs, where it is known as a *pulmonary embolism*. A deep vein thrombus can block the normal flow of blood, resulting in leg swelling and/or pain. There may also be warmth and redness. Deep vein thrombosis can also occur in an arm vein.



### Who is at risk

Many factors can increase your risk of developing deep vein thrombosis (DVT), including:

- A history of DVT
- Certain conditions or medications that make your blood thicker or more likely to clot than normal
- Injury to a deep vein from surgery, a broken bone, or other trauma
- Slow blood flow from a lack of movement, which can occur after a surgery and prolonged bed rest, or long periods of seated travel (i.e., in a plane, train, or car)
- Pregnancy and the first 6 weeks after giving birth
- Cancer treatment
- Being overweight or obese



## How to Prevent DVT

It is much easier to prevent DVT than to treat it. If you are at risk, it's a good idea to consider some of the following:

- Take any prescribed medications as directed by your doctor, such as blood thinners
- Check in with your doctor on a regular basis, especially if you are on medications
- Watch how much vitamin K you eat, if you are taking blood thinners belonging to the class of vitamin K antagonists, as they can affect how they work. Green leafy vegetables, canola oil, and soybean oil are examples of foods high in vitamin K
- Exercise your lower calf muscles if you will be sitting for a long time
- Get up and move your legs, especially if you have been on bed rest
- Make lifestyle changes
- Wear compression stockings if recommended by your doctor

## Symptoms

DVT occurs without any noticeable symptoms in about half of all cases. In the other half of cases, symptoms can include:

- Pain or tenderness in a leg, including ankle and foot, which may begin in the calf and feel like a cramp
- Swelling in the leg with DVT, including the ankle and redness on the leg
- A feeling of warmth in the leg
- Pain, swelling, warmth or redness in the arms or neck, if the blood clot is in these areas
- Coughing-up blood
- The warning signs of pulmonary embolism, which include:
  - Unexplained sudden shortness of breath
  - Chest pain or discomfort that gets worse with a deep breath or cough
  - Feeling lightheaded, dizzy, or fainting
  - A sense of nervousness or anxiety

## How is DVT diagnosed?

A physician will use a combination of medical history, physical examination, and diagnostic test results to identify your risk factors and rule out other causes of symptoms.

**Medical history** may include questions about your overall health, prescription medications, recent injuries or surgeries, and cancer treatment.

**Physical examination** will involve checking for signs of DVT in your legs, as well as blood pressure and listening to your heart and lungs.

**Diagnostic tests** can include:

- **Ultrasound** – a test using sound waves to create pictures of blood flow in the affected leg
- **D-dimer test** – a test to measure a substance in the blood that is released when a blood clot dissolves
- **Venography** – a procedure that involves injecting

## Treatment

The purpose of treatment is to stop your blood clot from getting bigger and to keep it from breaking free and causing blockages like a dangerous pulmonary embolism. DVT treatments, which consist mainly of medications and compression stockings, are also used to stop another DVT from happening.



## Medication

Medicines used to treat thrombosis are called anticoagulants. Anticoagulants reduce the body's ability to clot. This stops the abnormal clotting process and keeps a deep vein thrombus from getting larger and travelling to the lungs. Over time, the body slowly dissolves the clot. You can administer these medications yourself by subcutaneous injection (an injection given just below the skin) or orally (as tablets taken by mouth).

## Compression Stockings

Your physician may suggest that you wear specially fitted support stockings called 'compression stockings'. These stockings are helpful in reducing the swelling that occurs. They usually make the leg feel more comfortable, and they may help prevent the development of skin complications. The use of compression stockings should be started soon after anticoagulant therapy has begun, and should be worn every day for a minimum of 2 years, if possible.

## **Living with DVT**

Anticoagulant therapy should not prevent you from leading a normal lifestyle. However, there are certain things you should keep in mind while you are at risk for developing a DVT, or managing one, many of which were covered in the *How to prevent DVT* section of this site. Here are a few more tips.

## Diet

A nutritious diet is important for staying healthy. There are no special dietary limitations because you are taking medication for DVT, and there are no specific foods to avoid. However, you should not make major changes to your diet without discussing this with your physician.

## Other medications

Some over-the-counter medications may interact with your DVT medication, so it is important to let your doctor know if you are taking other medication regularly. Specifically Aspirin, because of its aspirin has blood-thinning qualities.

## Exercise

Regular exercise is also extremely important for good health. People who have physical limitations or chronic conditions will often benefit from increasing their level of physical activity. However, it's important to ask your doctor what level of exercise is appropriate for you.

## Alcohol

Moderate consumption of alcohol may be acceptable, but it's important to check with your doctor to be sure. However, chronic heavy consumption of alcohol is associated with an increased risk of bleeding for people taking on anticoagulant therapy.

The use of compression stockings should be started soon after anticoagulant therapy has begun, and should be worn every day for a minimum of 2 years, if possible.

## **Be proactive when sitting for a long period of time**

If you have to remain seated for a long time, such as during extended travel (4 hours or more), there are a few things you should remember to help prevent DVT:

- Get up and walk around every couple of hours, if you can
- Exercise your legs while sitting, such as tightening and releasing your leg muscles, or wiggling your toes or heels from time to time
- Wear loose-fitting clothes
- Drink lots of water, and stay away from drinks with alcohol or caffeine. Don't smoke.