



Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

What is a deep vein thrombosis (DVT)?

A deep vein thrombosis is a condition in which a blood clot forms inside a deep vein, usually in the calf or thigh, and partially or completely blocks the flow of blood in the vein.

What are the symptoms of a deep vein thrombosis?

Often, a DVT is silent or produces minimal symptoms. Symptoms can include: pain and/or sudden swelling of the legs, discoloration of visibly large veins, and skin that is warm to the touch. A complication of a DVT is a pulmonary embolism. If you experience sudden chest pain or shortness of breath, seek medical attention immediately.

What can cause a deep vein thrombosis?

- immobility/inactivity (prolonged sitting/bed rest)
- surgical procedures
- trauma to the veins
- pregnancy
- obesity
- certain medications (like birth control pills)
- smoking
- cancer
- heart failure
- genetic predisposition
- personal and/or family history

How is a deep vein thrombosis diagnosed?

A DVT is usually diagnosed with specific imaging studies to rule out other conditions. These studies include: Doppler ultrasound and CT/MRI scans. A D-dimer blood test may also be used but is less specific.

How is a deep vein thrombosis treated?

Medications: Anticoagulants such as warfarin, enoxaparin and heparin are most commonly used to treat a DVT by preventing clots from growing and new ones from forming. Thrombolytic agents are less often used (usually in life-threatening situations) but actually help dissolve clots; treatment with these agents requires hospitalization.

Surgery/vein filter: Only used if the clot is life-threatening or the patient cannot use medications.

How can I prevent having a future deep vein thrombosis?

Take anticoagulant medications as directed!

Maintain a healthy lifestyle: Exercise regularly, manage your weight and don't smoke.

If bedridden: Elevate the foot of your bed, do leg exercises and consider compression stockings.

While traveling: Keep hydrated, walk around for five minutes for every one to two hours, avoid crossing your legs, avoid short socks that are tight, do leg exercises while seated and consider compression stockings.