

Preventing Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

A deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot in a deep vein in the body, usually the lower leg, due to slow blood circulation. DVT can also develop in veins of the arm or chest. It is important to prevent a DVT if possible, and to watch for early signs and symptoms. A blood clot can cause serious problems if it breaks loose and travels to the heart, lung, or brain.

Who is at risk for DVT?

Anyone could develop a blood clot, but some people are at more risk. Risk factors for a DVT may include the following:

- Heart disease, such as congestive heart failure
- Cancer and cancer treatment
- Liver disease
- Older age
- Pregnancy or recently given birth
- Being overweight or obese
- Smoking
- Blood clotting disorders
- Inflammatory bowel disease, such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis
- Long periods of not moving, such as sitting, bedrest, and long car or plane rides
- Surgery
- Injury to a vein, broken bones, or trauma

Medicines or treatment can also put people at risk, including:

- Birth control pills
- Some antibiotics
- IV treatments

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

What are the signs and symptoms of DVT?

Some of the common signs and symptoms may include:

- Swelling
- Pain or tenderness
- Red skin that may be warm to the touch
- Skin that looks pale, blue, or feels cold to the touch
- Numbness or tingling
- Aching or pain in the calf or thigh
- Fever or chills
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain

People who do not have normal sensation may not feel pain, aching, or tingling. Carefully look at your legs each day to see if one leg is larger than the other.

If you think you have a DVT, sit, or lie down with your legs up. Do not massage the area or exercise a painful leg or groin muscle.

Call your doctor right away if you have any of signs or symptoms of DVT. If you cannot reach your doctor, go to the nearest Emergency Department.

How to prevent DVT?

- To help prevent DVT, your doctor may have you wear compression devices or elastic stockings.
 - › **Compression devices** are plastic wraps placed around your feet or legs. A pump pushes air into the wrap through tubes to put pressure on your muscles to help your blood flow.
 - › **Elastic stockings** help keep your circulation moving to prevent blood clots. Remove the stockings each day for 10 to 30 minutes. Check your feet and legs for redness, bruising, and sore areas. Ask your nurse or physical therapist to show you how to put on the stockings to avoid very tight or wrinkled areas. Lotion may be used if your legs are dry. Let the lotion dry before you put on the stockings. It is helpful to have two pairs of stockings, so you have a pair to wear while the other pair is being washed and dried. Wash the stockings each day with a mild soap, rinse, and air dry. Do not sit or lie in one position for a long period of time.

- **Do not** sit with your legs crossed or with constant pressure on the back of the knee. If your legs tend to swell, prop them on a stool when sitting.
- Exercise, such as walking, can help prevent DVT. **Ask your doctor what type of exercise or activity is best for you.**
- **Do not** smoke
- Drink plenty of fluids unless you have been told to limit your fluids.

How is DVT treated?

A common treatment for DVT is to take anticoagulant medicines, also known as blood thinners. Blood thinners help to keep blood clots from forming.

- If you need to take a blood thinner, it is very important to follow directions carefully. Ask your doctor or pharmacist for information about how to take this medicine.
- When you take a blood thinner, it is common to get your blood tested often. This is done to make sure you are taking the right dose (amount) of this medicine.
- Blood thinner medicine can cause side effects. The most common side effect is bleeding. It is important to tell your doctor right away if you have any unusual bleeding or bruising.