

Patient Education Handout

What is DVT?

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when an abnormal blood clot forms in a large vein. These clots usually develop in the lower leg, thigh, or pelvis, but can also occur in other large veins in the body. If you develop DVT and it is diagnosed correctly and quickly, it can be treated. However, many people do not know if they are at risk, don't know the symptoms, and delay seeing a healthcare professional if they do have symptoms

Can DVT Happen to Me?

Anyone may be at risk for DVT but the more risk factors you have, the greater your chance of developing DVT. Knowing the risk factors can help prevent DVT.

Hospitalization for a medical illness

- Recent major surgery or injury
- Personal history of a clotting disorder or previous DVT
- Increasing age
- Cancer and cancer treatments
- Pregnancy and the first 6 weeks after delivery
- Hormone replacement therapy or birth control products
- Family history of DVT
- Extended bed rest
- Obesity
- Smoking
- Prolonged sitting when traveling (longer than 6 to 8 hours)
- DVT symptoms and signs:
 - The following are the most common and usually occur in the affected limb:
 - Recent swelling of the limb
 - Unexplained pain or tenderness
 - Skin that may be warm to the touch
 - Redness of the skin

Since the symptoms of DVT can be similar to other conditions, like a pulled muscle, this often leads to a delay in diagnosis. Some people with DVT may have no symptoms at all.

DVT and Pulmonary Embolism (PE)

DVT can cause a life-threatening complication called pulmonary embolism (PE). Part or all of a clot can break off and travel through the bloodstream and into the lungs. A blood clot in the lungs can be life threatening and can cause death.

Symptoms of possible PE include:

- Recent or sudden shortness of breath
- Chest pain or discomfort, which worsens with a deep breath or coughing
- Coughing up blood
- Sudden collapse

If you have any of these symptoms, it is an emergency and you should seek medical help immediately.

What Can Be Done to Prevent DVT and PE

Most DVT and PE can be prevented.

In General:

- Exercise regularly
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Don't Smoke
- When sitting for long periods of time or when traveling for more than 6 hours
- Exercise your legs frequently while you are sitting
- Get up and walk around every 2 to 3 hours
- Wear loose-fitting clothes
- Drink plenty of water, limit caffeine and alcohol

Before and during hospitalization:

- Before surgery, talk to your health provider about prevention of blood clots.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you have any risk factors for DVT.

Ask Questions

If you have been confined to bed, move around as soon as possible

After surgery or hospitalization for a medical illness, a small dose of anti-coagulant medication is often given to prevent DVT and PE

Diagnosing DVT and PE

- DVT is generally diagnosed using:
- Venous Doppler ultrasound - using sound waves to check the flow of blood in the veins PE is generally diagnosed using:
- Computerized tomography (CT scan) of the lung, a special type of X-ray that can provide pictures of structures inside the body
- Ventilation-perfusion lung scan, a special test that shows how much blood is getting into the lungs
- What is the treatment of DVT and PE?
- DVT Treatment:

- Anticoagulants are also used to treat PE. In cases of severe PE, medicines (thrombolytics) may be given to dissolve the clot, followed by anticoagulants to prevent more clots from forming.
- Compression stockings, also called elastic stockings, are sometimes recommended to relieve pain and swelling after DVT.

PE Treatment

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More information about DVT symptoms, treatment and prevention and to take a free risk assessment visit www.thisisserious.org