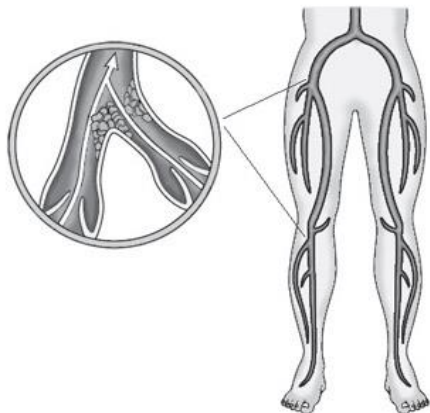


# Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

## What is DVT?



Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) occurs when a blood clot, also known as a *thrombus*, forms inside a vein.

The blood clot can partially or completely block the flow of blood through that vessel. The clot can also break free and travel to the lungs or the heart. A clot carried to the lungs or heart could potentially cause serious harm or be fatal.

## What are the Risk Factors for DVT?

- Chronic illness such as cancer or heart or lung disease
- Recent or ongoing cancer treatment
- Injury to a vein - from recent surgery, injury, or trauma
- Slowed blood flow from lack of movement (immobility)
- Increased estrogen - from birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, or pregnancy
- Having a central venous catheter
- A personal or family history of DVT
- Having a blood clotting disorder
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Age - being over the age of 60

## Why is Cancer a Risk Factor?

Cancer, its treatment, and the presence of additional risk factors can mean that your blood is more likely to clot. This increased tendency for the blood to clot is called *hypercoagulation*.

One study showed that cancer patients were 4 times more likely to develop blood clots than the general population. That risk increases if you are being treated with chemotherapy.

Cancer treatment may trigger clot formation. For example, when chemotherapy agents kill cancer cells, they release substances that promote blood clotting. Surgery or chemotherapy can harm the walls of your blood vessels, which can start your blood coagulation processes.

## What are the Symptoms of a DVT?

Often DVTs are silent and cause very few symptoms. Some of the symptoms at the site of the DVT may include:

- pain
- tenderness
- swelling
- discoloration
- warmer than normal skin

If a DVT breaks off and travels to the lungs, it can block the main artery that brings blood to your lungs, or one of its branches. This is called a *pulmonary embolism* or PE. Symptoms of a PE include:

- shortness of breath
- feeling of anxiety
- chest pain
- heart racing/fast pulse
- sweating
- a bloody cough

If you have any of these symptoms, whether at the hospital or elsewhere, **call 911 or go to the local emergency room.**

## What Are the Treatments for a DVT?

- **Anticoagulants** decrease your blood's ability to clot and help to prevent harmful clots from forming in the blood vessels. These medicines are sometimes called blood thinners, although they do not actually thin the blood.
- **Thrombolytic therapy** is a treatment for existing blood clots. A clot dissolving medication is injected into a blood vessel to break up the clot.
- **Surgery** is an option for people who cannot take anticoagulants or who develop a pulmonary embolism (PE) during anticoagulation therapy. The physician surgically removes the clot or inserts a filter to keep the clot from traveling to the heart or lungs.

## Is There Anything I Can Do to Prevent DVTs?

To reduce your risk, your doctor may instruct you to:

- get out of bed and move around as soon as possible after surgery or illness
- elevate your legs during times when you are not moving
- do leg exercises
- wear special compression bandages