

Deep Vein Thrombosis

What is Deep Vein Thrombosis?

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is the formation of a blood clot in a deep vein.

DVT commonly affects veins such as the femoral vein but can affect almost any vein in the body. The symptoms can include pain, swelling, warmth and redness of the affected limb. If the clot dislodges, it can travel to the lungs and cause a pulmonary embolism.

A DVT can occur as a result of several medical conditions which include physical trauma, infection or inflammation, cancer, nephrotic syndrome or having a central line.

The risk for DVT increases with certain factors including smoking, dehydration, using the birth control pill, pregnancy, obesity, immobilization, long trips where one's activity is restricted and having a family history of clotting disorders.

How is DVT diagnosed?

A DVT can be diagnosed using a blood test called a d-Dimer and imaging by ultrasound.

How is DVT treated?

Anticoagulants are the most common form of treatment for DVT. The more common types of anticoagulants are Warfarin and Enoxaparin. The duration of treatment will depend on the reason for getting the clot in the first place.

Occasionally, for an extensive clot, thrombolysis is used. This involves injecting a medication into the vein and manually attempting to break the clot up. Compression stockings may be used to aid blood flow back to the heart by exerting pressure on the affected limb. This prevents blood from pooling and reduces pain and swelling.

Post-thrombotic syndrome

Post-thrombotic syndrome is a long-term complication of DVT. Often the valve in the vein is damaged due to the clot which results in inefficiency of the vein to bring blood back to the heart. Symptoms can include swelling, change in temperature, differences in limb circumference, varicose veins, pain, and skin changes. One in three children will develop PTS up to ten years after having DVT. Wearing compression stockings may help with the symptoms.

How can I prevent DVT?

The mainstay of prevention is minimizing risk factors:

- Stay active with regular exercise
- Stay well hydrated
- Avoid obesity
- Don't smoke
- Talk to your doctor before taking the birth control pill
- On long trips move around, stretch frequently and drink plenty of fluids
- Make sure any doctor who treats you knows you have a clotting risk
- If hospitalized and/or immobile for a prolonged period, anticoagulation may be beneficial
- Wear a compression stocking, especially on long trips or when your limb is feeling more swollen
- Elevate your limb when you are sitting for long periods
- In-flight: wear loose clothing, don't cross your legs, avoid sleeping pills or long rest periods, avoid alcohol or caffeine