



# Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

*Signs, symptoms, and prevention*

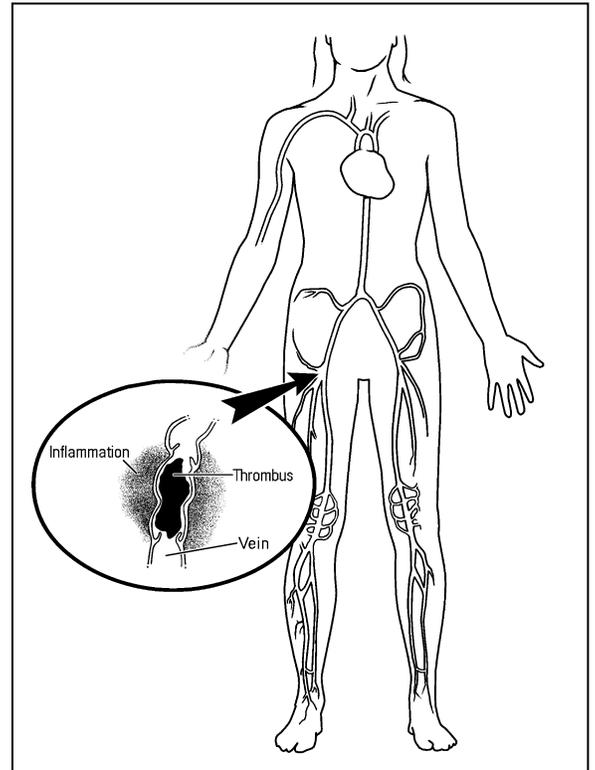
**A deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot in your leg or arm. Read this handout to learn more about the causes, symptoms, risks, and treatment for DVTs.**

## What is a DVT?

A *deep vein thrombosis* (DVT) is a blood clot (*thrombus*) that forms in the deep veins of the body. Most DVTs form in the legs, either above or below the knee.

A DVT can happen to anyone who has movement problems or has had recent surgery. Lack of muscle use in the legs can cause blood to collect in the veins of the legs and feet. This can cause a thrombus to form.

Conditions that may put you at risk for a DVT are increasing age, hormones, cancer and its treatment, major surgery (of the abdomen, pelvis, legs, or feet), trauma (fracture of a pelvis, hip, or leg bone), obesity, stroke or paralysis, indwelling central venous catheter, varicose veins, heart problems, chronic respiratory failure, and prior *venous thrombus*. DVTs can also form during or after long-term bedrest or long trips in a car or airplane.



DVTs usually form in blood vessels of the leg or groin.

## **What are the signs and symptoms of DVT?**

*The most common signs and symptoms of DVT are:*

- Swelling.
- Redness or discoloration.
- Tenderness, pain, or unusual warmth in the leg.

**If you suspect that you have a DVT, call your doctor right away or come to the Emergency Room.**

## **What are the risks of DVT?**

Clots that form in the veins can break apart and travel to other parts of the body, including the lungs. A blood clot in the lungs is called a *pulmonary embolism* (PE). This type of clot can be life-threatening and must be treated right away.

*Signs and symptoms of pulmonary embolism are:*

- Difficulty breathing (shortness of breath).
- Chest pain.
- Rapid heartbeat or fainting.
- Low-grade fever.
- Cough with or without bloody *sputum* (spit).

If you have these symptoms, call 9-1-1 right away.

## **How can a DVT be prevented?**

Follow these tips to avoid DVT:

- Avoid tight clothing, nylons, or socks, especially ones that are too tight at the top and/or leave marks on your skin. These may restrict the blood flow through your veins.
- Raise your legs 6 inches above your heart from time to time. This will help improve blood flow and reduce swelling.
- If your health care provider has prescribed elastic stockings (also called compression stockings) or Ace wraps, wear them as instructed. While they may feel tight, they actually promote blood flow and do not pose a risk of cutting off circulation.
- Follow your exercise plan.

## Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. Clinic staff are also available to help.

### UWMC patients:

- UWMC Rehabilitation Clinic:  
206-598-4295
- UWMC Surgical Specialties Center:  
206-598-4549
- UWMC 4-Southeast:  
206-598-4400
- UWMC 4-South:  
206-598-4670

### Seattle Cancer Care Alliance patients:

- SCCA Women's Center: 206-288-7300
- SCCA General Oncology:  
206-288-7400

- Change your position often. Do not sit or stand for over 1 hour at a time.
- Reduce sodium (salt) in your diet, since it causes fluid retention.
- Avoid bumping or injuring your legs.
- Avoid crossing your legs.
- Look for unusual or sudden swelling or redness of your legs every day.
- Do not put pillows under your knees when you are in bed.
- If possible, raise the foot of your bed 4 to 6 inches on blocks or books.
- If your doctor prescribes medicine to decrease the risk of DVT, take it as you are told.

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