

Deep vein thrombosis

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot in a vein, usually the leg. They can occur in the veins of the calf, thigh or pelvis. DVT can be dangerous.

Ask for an urgent appointment with your GP if:

- you have symptoms of DVT

Symptoms of DVT (deep vein thrombosis)

Symptoms of DVT are usually:

- throbbing or pain in your calf or thigh which is worse when walking
- swelling, usually in 1 leg, in your ankle, calf or both
- skin on the calf area that is warm when you touch it

DVT can be a very serious condition. Blood clots in your veins can break loose, travel through your bloodstream and get stuck in your lungs. This is called a [pulmonary embolism](#).

[What a blood clot in the leg can look like](#)

Who is more likely to get DVT

The majority of DVT happens in patients who are in, or recently have been in, hospital or a nursing home. This is especially true if you cannot move around much, such as after an operation.

DVT is more likely to happen if you:

- are over 60
- are overweight
- smoke
- have had DVT before
- take the combined oral contraceptive pill
- have cancer or heart failure

- are pregnant or if you've had a baby in the previous 6 weeks
- are confined to bed

How DVT is diagnosed

If your GP thinks you may have DVT they will refer you to your nearest emergency department (ED).

Doctors will assess your condition and you'll have blood tests to look for fragments of a blood clot. They may arrange for an ultrasound scan of your veins to tell if you have DVT.

You may be given an injection of heparin while you are waiting for your ultrasound scan. This is an anti-coagulant medicine. It stops blood clots from increasing in size and prevents any complications.

Treatment of DVT

If you are diagnosed with DVT you will continue with heparin injections.

Heparin is given under the skin once a day for 4 to 5 days. You will usually be switched to a tablet form of medication after this.

Warfarin used to be the standard medication for DVT. Newer anticoagulant medications called direct oral anti-coagulation (DOAC) are now being used. These are also known as 'novel' or 'newer' oral anti-coagulation (NOAC). How long you have to take this medication will depend on the cause of the DVT and how serious it is.

In rare cases where a leg is in danger, the clot may be dissolved using clot-busting drugs.

DVT in pregnancy is treated with anticoagulant injections for the rest of the pregnancy and until the baby is at least 6 weeks old.

Recovery from DVT

After having a DVT you will be encouraged to have regular exercise. Walking is best.

Your doctor will advise you to wear a compression stocking, usually below the knee. A healthcare professional should measure and fit this for you.

Talk to your GP if you are recovering from DVT and are planning a long haul flight or a long journey.

Tips to prevent DVT

Do

- ✓ stay a healthy weight

- ✓ stay active - taking regular walks can help

Don't

- ✗ do not sit still for long periods - get up and move around every hour or so
- ✗ do not smoke - [get support to stop smoking](#)

Going on a long journey

If you're travelling for 3 hours or more by plane, train or car, there are things you can do during the journey to reduce your risk of DVT.

Take these steps to reduce your risk of DVT:

- wear loose, comfortable clothes
- walk around whenever you can
- wear a fitted compression stocking, sometimes called 'flight socks'
- do calf exercises at least every half hour

To do calf exercises:

- raise your heels, keeping your toes on the floor, then bring them down 10 times
- then raise and lower your toes 10 times

If you need to stay in hospital

Before you go to hospital for a planned procedure, your healthcare team will check you for any risk factors of DVT. They will give you advice on what you need to do such as not taking the contraceptive pill.

In hospital, you may be fitted with compression stockings and given an injection of heparin under the skin to reduce the risk of developing a blood clot.

You may continue treatment after you leave hospital because a blood clot can happen weeks later.

You can also help protect yourself against DVT while you're in hospital by:

- staying active and walking around if you can
- moving your toes (up and down) and ankles (in circles) if you have to stay in bed

Your healthcare team may give you some exercises to do.

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