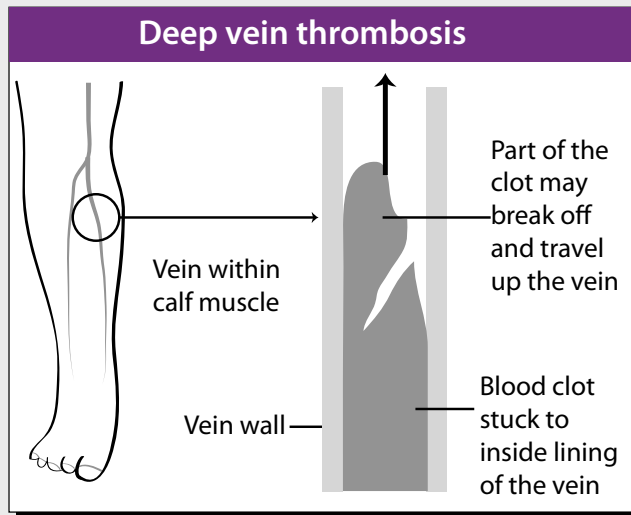


What are DVT and pulmonary embolus?

A DVT is a blood clot which forms in a vein, usually in the leg. Veins take blood back to your heart from every part of the body.

Although veins in the leg are a common place for a DVT, other veins can be affected, for example in your stomach.

The blood clot forms in a vein deep inside your leg. You cannot see these veins on the surface of your leg.



If someone has a DVT, part of the blood clot could break off and travel in the bloodstream. It keeps travelling until it gets stuck somewhere, almost always in the lung.

This is called a pulmonary embolism (PE). This is extremely serious and, if not treated, can lead to death.

It is important to know the warning signs of a DVT, so the blood clot can be treated before it travels to your lungs.

What are the warning signs of a DVT?

Typical symptoms usually include:

- ⊙ pain in one leg which is worse when your leg is pressed;
- ⊙ your leg becoming warm and red; and
- ⊙ swelling in your leg.

Usually only one leg is affected at any time. But, sometimes DVT can affect both legs.

If the clot is small and has travelled to your lungs, you may not feel anything wrong in your chest.

A bigger clot may cause pain in your chest and may make it hard to breathe.

Other symptoms of PE are coughing up blood and if you collapse for no obvious reason.

What should I do if I have these warning signs?

You should:

- ⊙ arrange to see your GP immediately; or
- ⊙ go to your local accident and emergency department (casualty).

You can contact NHS 24 for advice outwith your GP's normal opening hours.

What tests will I get?

Not everyone with these symptoms has DVT or PE. You can suffer these symptoms and there are other causes.

To help the doctor decide if you have a DVT or PE, they will ask you a series of questions and examine you to decide how likely it is that you have DVT or PE. They may then suggest the following tests to be carried out as soon as possible.

- ⊙ A blood test called the D-dimer test.
- ⊙ An ultrasound scan, if DVT is suspected.
- ⊙ A lung scan and chest X-ray, if PE is suspected.

These tests are reliable but, as with all investigations, they are not always 100% accurate. It may be suggested that you have another ultrasound scan after a few days. If the tests are negative but you are still having the symptoms, or they come back, you should see your GP or go to accident and emergency.

What is the treatment for DVT and PE?

The usual treatment for DVT is a medicine (such as heparin or warfarin) to break down the blood clot. The aim of the medicine is to:

- ⊙ stop the blood clot getting bigger, and breaking off and travelling to your lungs;
- ⊙ prevent a DVT from happening again in the future; and
- ⊙ prevent further pulmonary emboli from developing.

You may also wear compression stockings to reduce the swelling and improve the chance of your leg returning to normal.

Who is more likely to get a DVT?

Anyone can get a DVT, but you are more at risk if you:

- 1 or anyone in your family has had a DVT before;
- 2 have had an operation recently (within the last three months);
- 3 are not able to move about as much as usual, for example, if you have an injury or illness or have had surgery which stops you moving around;
- 4 have been unable to move around on a long journey by car, plane or train (more than four hours continuous travelling);
- 5 have a medical condition that causes your blood to clot more easily (thrombophilia);
- 6 are on the combined oral contraceptive (the pill) or HRT;
- 7 are pregnant or have had a baby in the past six weeks;
- 8 have cancer;
- 9 have some types of heart disease or blood disorders; or
- 10 are overweight.

What can I do to lower the chances of getting a DVT?

To help reduce the risk of a DVT you can:

- ⦿ exercise regularly; and
- ⦿ maintain a healthy weight.

If you are travelling on a long journey, for example for more than four hours, remember the following.

Don't:

- ⦿ sit with your legs crossed; and

Do:

- ⦿ move around as much as possible before, during and after the journey; and
- ⦿ leg exercises, such as bending your foot up and down.

Some people choose to wear compression stockings. If you do, make sure that they are a good fit.

There is no evidence that taking aspirin will help prevent a DVT on long journeys.

If you go into hospital, your carers should assess your risk of DVT to decide on the best actions to prevent one.

You should take the opportunity to ask your doctor about this.

Useful contacts

NHS 24: 08454 242424. Calls are charged at local rate.

SIGN Executive
Elliott House
8 -10 Hillside Crescent
Edinburgh EH7 5EA

Phone: 0131 623 4720 • Fax: 0131 623 4503
Website: www.sign.ac.uk

Deep-vein thrombosis (DVT)

A deep-vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot in a vein, usually in the leg.

This leaflet explains:

- ⦿ what a DVT is;
- ⦿ who might be more likely to get a DVT;
- ⦿ how you can tell if you might have a DVT;
- ⦿ what to do if you think you have a DVT;
- ⦿ what treatment there is for a DVT; and
- ⦿ how you can lower your chances of getting a DVT

This leaflet is based on an original leaflet produced by Dr Jennifer Dooley, The Medical Centre, Dubbs Place, Port Glasgow, with Jean Mossman