

What is Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is a condition in which a blood clot (thrombus) forms in a blood vessel located deep in the body, usually in the leg or arm. This results in the blood flow through the vein to be partially or completely blocked, causing the affected limb to become painful, red and swollen.

What causes Deep Vein Thrombosis?

Your blood usually flows quickly through the veins in your leg because of the squeezing action from your muscles as you move. This stops a clot from forming.

While it is not always possible to identify a reason, there are several factors that may increase the risk of developing DVT:

- Injury or trauma. The damage to the blood vessel can restrict or block blood flow, resulting in a blood clot.
- Previous episodes of DVT or other blood clotting problems.
- Surgery in the last 3 months
- Reduced mobility due to surgery, illness, injury or long-distance travel.
- Increasing age
- Obesity
- Pregnancy
- Use of oral contraceptives (birth control pills)
- Genetic risk factors – there are several genetic mutations that have been recognised to increase one's risk of a blood clot

How is Deep Vein Thrombosis treated?

The recommended treatment is an anticoagulant which is a medication which will thin the blood and prevent the clot from getting bigger and stop it from breaking off and causing a pulmonary embolism. The blood clot will naturally dissolve in your body over time.

When do I need to seek immediate medical attention?

You should seek immediate medical attention if your symptoms worsen, or when you develop new symptoms.

A DVT, if left untreated, can develop into a **Pulmonary Embolism (PE)**. This is when the blood clot in your deep vein breaks away and flows to the lung and lodges itself in the lung's blood vessel. This may result in a blockage of your lung's blood vessels and can be life-threatening.

When this happens, you will experience new symptoms such as:

- Pain in the chest or upper back
- Difficulty in breathing
- Coughing out blood

What are the risks and side-effects of Anticoagulant medication?

While anticoagulant medication is effective for treating DVT, it is associated with increased bleeding risks and side effects. You must seek medical attention if you develop:

- Prolonged or excessive bleeding
- Blood in your urine/stool
- Bleeding gums
- Prolonged nose-bleeds
- Coughing out blood
- Heavy periods for women
- Exceptional weakness, tiredness, paleness, dizziness, headache, unexplained swelling, breathlessness, chest pain or angina.

What do I need to do after I go home?

- Wear compression stockings or leggings – Post-thrombotic syndrome is a common complication of DVT. Symptoms include leg swelling, varicose veins and leg ulcers. These symptoms can be life-long. Wearing compression stockings for at least two years following a DVT can help minimise this.
- Avoid prolonged exercises – Your physical activity may be limited due to your symptoms. Avoid prolonged periods of exercise in the first few weeks, and have enough rest.
- Check with your doctor before taking other medication – Some medication like aspirin and ibuprofen may interfere with your treatment. Always check with your doctor before taking any other medication, including herbal and alternative treatments.
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet – A healthy and balanced diet of fruits, vegetables and whole grains can help reduce the risk of DVT.
- Avoid drinking alcohol – Alcohol can interfere with your medication. It is recommended to avoid drinking alcohol or to limit your intake to no more than two units of alcohol each day.
- Refrain from long-distance travel – Long hours of immobility may increase the risk of DVT. It is advisable to avoid long-distance travelling for the first six weeks.

How do I find out more?

You can contact us at Centre For Clinical Haematology (CFCH) to find out more about DVT and our Anticoagulant treatment.

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