

# Deep Vein Thrombosis and Pulmonary Embolism

## General Information

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE) are blood clotting conditions.

- In DVT, a blood clot forms in one of the deep veins surrounded by muscle in the leg.
  - The clot may partly or completely block blood flow through the vein, causing leg swelling.
  - The clot may break off and travel through the bloodstream. As a result, the clot may lodge in the lung arteries, causing severe damage. This condition is called a pulmonary embolism. It can be serious and life-threatening.

If DVT is not treated, it can lead to a pulmonary embolism.

- DVT can rarely form in the arm, abdominal, pelvic, neck and head veins.

These blood-clotting conditions can be serious but are treatable with blood-thinner medicines (known as anticoagulants).

## Causes

There are a number of risk factors for DVT and PE, including:

- long periods of inactivity that decrease blood flow and increase the risk of developing blood clots, such as:
  - recovery from a surgery or an injury
  - long road trips
- a previous episode of DVT or PE
- cancer
- pregnancy
- the hormone estrogen found in birth control pills
- having a catheter in a vein
- blood-clotting problems that run in your family
- some blood disorders.

## Signs and Symptoms

### For DVT:

- sudden pain or swelling in the leg
- enlarged veins near the surface of the skin
- reddish-blue skin
- warm skin at the site

### For PE:

- sudden shortness of breath
- sharp chest pain
- cough that produces bloody sputum
- excessive sweating
- rapid pulse
- feeling lightheaded

## How Your Health Care Provider Will Confirm You Have it

Your health care provider will give you an exam.

You may need tests such as blood tests, ultrasound or a CT (computerized tomography) test.

## Treatment

Your health care provider will treat DVT to prevent a pulmonary embolism and to keep another clot from forming.

You will likely be treated with anticoagulant medicines. They keep the clots from getting bigger or traveling to the lungs.

How long you take this medicine is based on many things, including bleeding risk and if the cause of the clot is known or not.

Common anticoagulants are:

- apixaban (Eliquis®)
- rivaroxaban (Xarelto®)
- dabigatran (Pradaxa®)
- edoxaban (Savaysa®)
- warfarin (Jantoven®).

There are some important things to know if you take an anticoagulant:

- If you take warfarin, you will need regular blood tests to check how your blood is clotting. Your health care provider will tell you more about this.
- It is important to take medicines as prescribed.
- Tell your health care provider if you have any changes with your health or medicines.
- Keep all follow-up appointments, even if you feel well.
- **Call your health care provider right away** if you have any bleeding or other changes in your health.

Things you can do to reduce your risk include:

- Get up and walk around if you have been sitting for more than 60 minutes.
- Drink a lot of water each day.
- Take walks every day. (You can walk for 30 to 60 minutes at a time.)
- Don't smoke.
- Wear compression stockings if your health care provider suggested them.