

DVT at-a-glance

Deep-vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when a thrombus (blood clot) forms in one of the large veins, usually in the lower limbs, leading to either partially or completely **blocked** circulation.

DVT affects an estimated 2 million Americans each year. Up to 600,000 people are hospitalized and approximately 300,000 Americans die each year from DVT-related PE in the U.S.—that's more than AIDS and breast cancer combined.ⁱ Given this startling statistic, it's important to know the facts.

DVT FAST FACTS

- Deep-vein thrombosis most often occurs in the lower limbs, including the thigh or the calf.
- Only about half of the people with DVT experience symptoms. Sometimes DVT produces minimal or no symptoms.ⁱⁱ
- Symptoms of DVT may include pain, tenderness, swelling or discoloration of the affected area, and skin that is warm to the touch.ⁱⁱ
- The leading medical factors that cause DVT are: injury, immobility, surgery and/or illnesses that may include cancer, clotting disorders, and inflammatory diseases.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Prolonged immobility (i.e. sitting or lying down) still can slow down the blood flow and lead to blood “pooling,” or accumulating in the extremities.^{iv}
- While most victims are 60 years or older, DVT can strike anyone at risk.
- Certain cancers may cause clotting factors in the blood to increase. Clotting factors may also be affected as a result of an infection or injury to a blood vessel or following surgery.
- Pregnant women are five times more likely than non-pregnant women to develop DVT. Risk increases in the third trimester and immediately following delivery.^v
- Women taking oral contraceptives or hormone replacement may be at increased risk of DVT.^{vi}
- This is only a partial list. For a full list go to preventdvt.org

PULMONARY EMBOLISM

- A major risk associated with DVT is the development of a pulmonary embolism (PE). PE occurs when a blood clot breaks loose from the wall of a vein and travels to the lungs, blocking the pulmonary artery or one of its branches.
- Patients with PE may experience shortness of breath, an apprehensive feeling, chest pain, rapid pulse, sweating, or a bloody cough.^{vii,viii}
- DVT-related PE is the leading cause of preventable hospital death in U.S. hospitals.ⁱⁱⁱ

PREVENTION

- Because DVT can occur with little or no warning, the best action to take against DVT is prevention.
 - Without preventive treatment, up to 60 percent of patients who undergo total hip replacement surgery may develop DVT.^{ix}
- If you believe you may be experiencing DVT symptoms, talk to your healthcare professional immediately.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

If you are diagnosed with DVT, there are treatments that may alleviate the effects.

MEDICATIONS

Drugs generally used to treat DVT fall into two basic categories: Thrombolytic or Anticoagulants.

SURGICAL PROCEDURES

Patients who are unable to take anticoagulants or who develop pulmonary embolism while on therapy may require the insertion of a filter or surgery to remove the clot.

PRACTICAL MEASURES

- To minimize pain and discomfort your doctor may recommend that you:
 - Elevate the affected leg whenever possible
 - Apply heat to relieve pain and reduce swelling
 - Wear compression bandages or support hose
 - Avoid long periods of immobility

ⁱ Gerotziafas GT, Samama MM. Prophylaxis of venous thromboembolism medical patients. *Curr Opin Pulm Med.* 2004; 10:356-365.

ⁱⁱ National Heart Blood and Lung Institute (NHLBI). What are the signs and symptoms of Deep Vein Thrombosis? (http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Dvt/DVT_SignsAndSymptoms.html) Accessed 9/30

ⁱⁱⁱ Geerts WH, Pineo GF, Heit JA et al. Prevention of venous thromboembolism: The Seventh ACCP Conference on Antithrombotic and Thrombolytic Therapy. *Chest* 2004; 126(suppl): 338S-400S.

^{iv} National, Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. Who Is At Risk for Deep Vein Thrombosis?

Available at http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Dvt/DVT_Diagnosis.html (accessed September 15, 2009)

^v Heit JA, Kobbervig CE, James AH, Petterson TM, Bailey KR, Melton, LJ3rd. Trends in the incidence of venous thromboembolism during pregnancy or postpartum: a 30-year population-based study. *Ann Intern Med* 2005;143(10): 697-706.

^{vi} Vascular Disease foundation. Focus on Blood Clots: Venous Thromboembolism (VTE): What you need to know about risk factors, symptoms, and treatment. Available at http://www.venousdiseasecoalition.org/resources/documents/VTEBrochure_Web.pdf. (accessed October 1, 2009)

^{vii} American Public Health Association. Presented at: Public Health Leadership Conference on Deep-Vein Thrombosis; February 26, 2003; Washington, D.C. White Paper.

^{viii} The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Facts About Deep Vein Thrombosis. Available online at <http://www.cdc.gov/nccdd/dvt/508-DVTFactSheet.pdf>. Accessed September 24, 2009.

^{ix} Geerts WH, Heit JA, Clagett GP, et al. Prevention of venous thromboembolism. *Chest*. 2001;119(suppl):1325-1755.

