

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VENOUS THROMBOEMBOLISM

What Is Venous Thromboembolism?

Venous thromboembolism (VTE) is a common and potentially life-threatening condition that causes blood clots to form inside veins. VTE most commonly causes blood clots in the lower legs, known as deep venous thrombosis (DVT), and it can also cause blood clots in the lungs, known as pulmonary embolism (PE). More than half of all VTE disease results from transient risk factors and may be preventable.

Risk factors for VTE include:

- Recent injury
- Recent surgery
- Recent bed rest, including prolonged hospitalization
- Active cancer
- Family history of VTE
- Autoimmune disorders

How Can It Be Prevented?

- Blood thinners can prevent VTE in patients who are at high risk.
- Compression stockings may be applied to the legs to prevent VTE.
- The risk for clots must be balanced with the risk for bleeding.
- Early mobilization also decreases VTE risk.

What Are the Warning Signs?

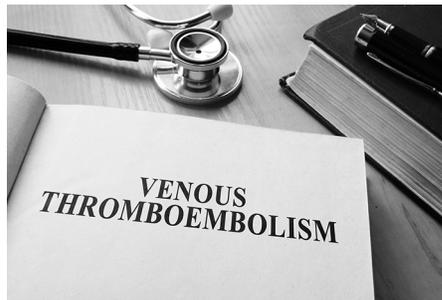
In many cases of VTE, there may be no symptoms.

When symptoms do occur, they include:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Swelling in the leg, including the calf, ankle, and foot
- Pain in the leg
- Skin that feels warm to the touch
- Changes in skin color (redness)

How Is It Diagnosed?

Your doctor will check your vital signs, including your oxygen level, and examine your heart, lungs, and legs for any swelling or tenderness. Your doctor will also evaluate your risk factors and may do blood tests to see if further testing is needed. Additional tests may include an ultrasound of the legs or more advanced imaging of the chest, such as computed tomography.



How Is It Treated?

Blood thinners are the most effective treatment for VTE and may be given by injection and by mouth. Most people can be successfully treated as outpatients. Patients with VTE who are clinically unstable or those who are at high risk for complications from DVT or PE may be treated in the hospital. People with VTE may need to take blood thinners for at least 3 months. Many patients with VTE may require lifelong treatment with blood thinners. Moving the legs, elevating the legs, and using compression stockings can help keep the legs from swelling while the clot is being treated.

Questions for My Doctor

- What are my risk factors for VTE?
- What can I do to prevent blood clots in the future?
- What are the risks and benefits of blood thinners?
- What symptoms require emergency care?
- How long will I need to stay on blood thinners?
- Are there any activities I should avoid?
- Can I take blood thinners if I am pregnant?

For More Information



Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dvt/facts.html

Mayo Clinic

www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/deep-vein-thrombosis/symptoms-causes/syc-20352557