

Deep Vein Thrombosis & Pulmonary Embolism

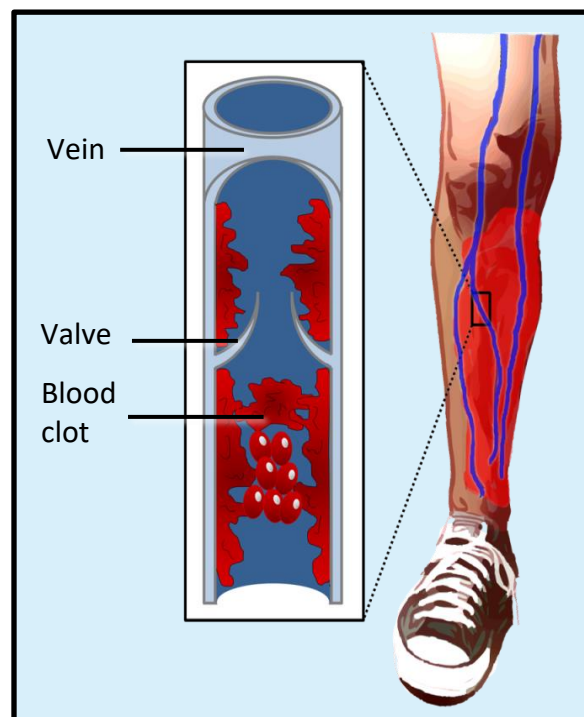
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot (thrombus) that occurs in deep veins. A DVT starts with blood cells sticking to the walls of your deep veins. These blood cells clump together to form a blood clot. Sometimes your body can break down the blood clot. Other times, the clot can grow large enough to block your vein.

If a blood clot loosens from the vein walls, it can enter your blood stream causing an embolism. An **embolism** is a blood clot that gets stuck in smaller arteries and blocks blood flow. A **pulmonary embolism** is a blood clot that blocks blood flow in your lungs. This can prevent blood from picking up oxygen in the lungs, make it difficult to breath, and can even cause death.

DVT and pulmonary embolism are **MEDICAL EMERGENCIES**. They need to be treated right away. Understanding your risk and symptoms can help you manage their impacts.

Spinal Cord Injury and DVT

Blood flows through your body mostly because of the pumping action of your heart. In your lower legs, muscle contractions (movement) help blood flow. The weakness caused by spinal cord injury slows blood flow through the veins of the legs. This slower blood flow can cause blood clots. The greater the weakness, the greater the risk of DVT after spinal cord injury. People with complete spinal cord injuries (no movement) are at a greater risk than people with incomplete spinal cord injuries (some movement).



DVT can happen any time but is most common in the first few months after spinal cord injury.

Contact your Doctor or Nurse for more information.

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Vein damage can also increase your risk of DVT. Injuries (trauma), broken bones, or surgery can cause vein damage. Other factors that increase DVT risk include older age, medication (e.g. birth control pills), family history, and pregnancy.

Signs and Symptoms of DVT

DVT is a medical emergency and needs to be treated right away. DVT most often happens in your lower legs (e.g. calf muscle) on one side. DVTs can happen in other locations as well (e.g. thighs, arms). Symptoms include:

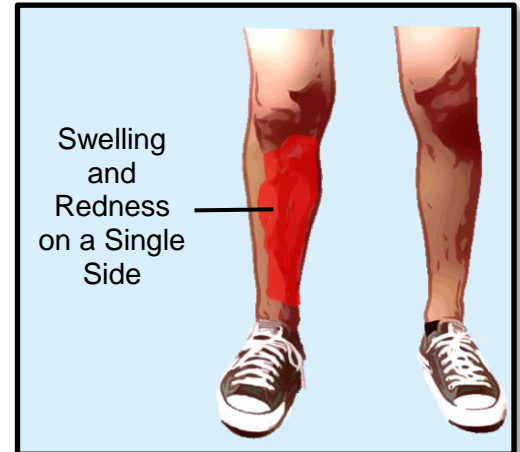
- Swelling of the affected area on one side (e.g. right lower leg)
- Pain or tenderness when the affected area (e.g. right lower leg) is touched or squeezed if you have sensation. Spasms may increase if you don't have sensation,
- Changes in your skin colour, for example, redness, (in lighter skin) blue (in darker skin)
- Skin that is warm to the touch
- The area might look shiny and feels hard to the touch

After a spinal cord injury, your sensation may not be the same as before. This might make it more difficult to recognize symptoms of a DVT. Doing daily skin checks is a good way to be sure your body is healthy. If you have symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.

People with spinal cord injury do not always show symptoms of DVT. Sometimes symptoms of pulmonary embolism are the first signs that something is not right.

Preventing DVT

If you are at risk of DVT, doctors will likely prescribe medications (blood thinners) that reduce blood clotting.



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Signs and Symptoms of Pulmonary Embolism

Pulmonary embolism is a **MEDICAL EMERGENCY**. If you have symptoms, seek medical attention right away. You may call 911 for help. Common symptoms of pulmonary embolism include:

- Sudden difficulty breathing
- Stabbing or sharp chest pain when breathing in
- Coughing or vomiting blood

Other symptoms that often come with the main symptoms include:

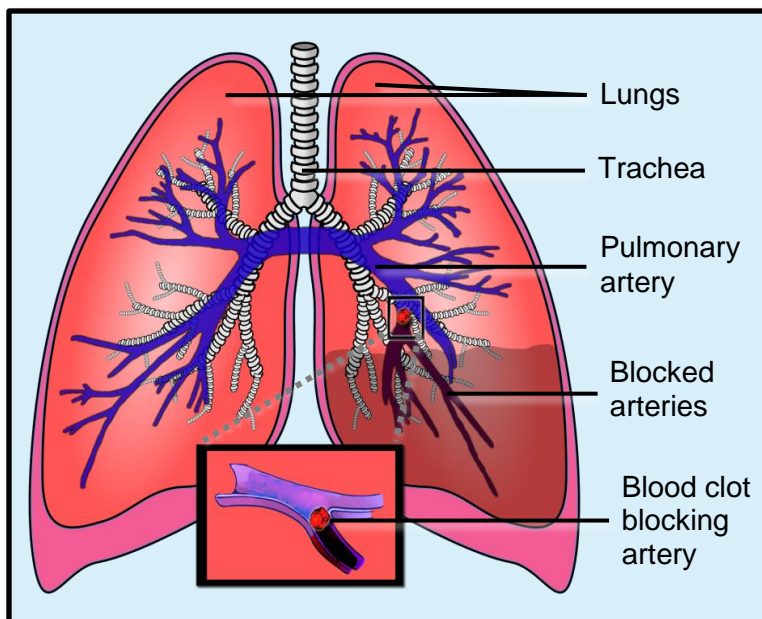
- Fever
- Dizziness
- Fainting
- Anxiety
- Sweating
- Increased heart rate

The lung is the most common place for a blood clot from the legs to be stuck. This is because the lung is the first place where blood flow from the legs finds small arteries.

Treating DVT and Pulmonary Embolism

DVT needs to be treated at a hospital. Treatments include:

- Dissolving the clot with medications
- Placing a filter in large veins to prevent another embolus
- Removal of clot through a procedure or surgery



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