What Is Deep Vein Thrombosis?

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot in the veins deep in the leg. It may cause pain and swelling. It is important to treat DVT so the clot does not get worse. It could also move to the lungs and cause serious breathing problems, circulation problems, or even death. DVT can happen:

- If you don’t move your legs after an injury
- While in the hospital, when you are in bed for a long time
- After an operation
- During a long airplane trip
- In some people with cancer
- In some women who take birth control pills or hormones
- In people with blood that clots more easily

What Are the Warning Signs of Deep Vein Thrombosis?

In about half of all DVT cases, there may be no symptoms. Some symptoms that can happen are:

- Swelling in the leg, including the ankle and foot
- Pain in the leg; the pain often starts in the calf and can feel like cramping
- Skin that feels warm to the touch
- Changes in skin color (redness)

How Is Deep Vein Thrombosis Diagnosed?

Your doctor will look at your leg. Your doctor may order an ultrasound to see if there’s a clot in the veins of the leg. An ultrasound is a painless test that takes a picture of the veins. Other blood tests may be done to check if you are at a higher risk for blood clots.

How Is Deep Vein Thrombosis Treated?

Medicines called blood thinners are given to prevent more clots in the leg and keep a clot from going to the lungs. People with DVT may need to take blood thinners for many months, sometimes longer. Special stockings, called pressure stockings, can help keep the leg from swelling while the clot is being treated.
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

Questions for My Doctor
- What are my risk factors for DVT?
- What can I do to prevent blood clots in the future?
- What are the risks and benefits of treatment with blood thinners?
- What symptoms require emergency care?
- How long will I need to stay on blood thinners to treat DVT?
- Are there any activities I should avoid?

Bottom Line
- Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blot clot in the veins of the leg.
- Some DVTs can occur with no symptoms. Warning signs may include pain and swelling of the leg, redness, and skin that feels warm to the touch.
- DVT can be diagnosed with physical examination of the leg and ultrasound. Some blood tests may be needed.
- Blood thinner medicines may be given to prevent new blood clots and to stop existing clots from getting bigger or traveling to the lungs. You may also need to wear a special stocking to prevent swelling.

For More Information
- CDC: www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dvt/facts.html

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