

What is a DVT?

A deep vein thrombosis or DVT is a blood clot which may form in one of the large veins in your body. This happens most commonly in the legs. The clot can partly or completely block normal blood flow, which may cause symptoms such as pain, swelling, warmth, or redness in the affected area.

In some cases, a clot (or part of it) can break off and travel to the lungs. This is called a **pulmonary embolus (PE)**. A PE can block blood flow in the lungs and reduce the amount of oxygen reaching the rest of your body. This can be a serious condition and requires urgent medical attention.

What increases my risk of developing a DVT?

Having surgery increases your risk of developing a DVT. Your **risk** may be **higher** if any of the following apply to you:

- Previous blood clot.
- Family history of blood clots.
- Smoking.
- Current or past cancer, or cancer treatment.
- Varicose veins.
- Long-term illness or a blood disorder.
- Age over 40.
- Being overweight.
- Pregnancy or having recently given birth.
- Taking the oral contraceptive pill.
- Hormone replacement therapy (HRT).
- Taking steroids.
- Low levels of physical activity.

How can I reduce my risk of a DVT?

Please inform your surgeon or our nursing team as soon as possible if you are at a higher risk so that we can discuss a preventative DVT treatment plan with you.

Actions to take:

- Avoid sitting for long periods of time.
- Walking as often as your surgeon or nurses have advised.
- Elevate your legs if you are sitting for moderate periods of time.
- Gently exercising your feet and legs while in bed.
- Quit smoking or reduce the amount you smoke.
- If overweight, try and reduce your weight.
- Exercise regularly.
- Keep hydrated (drink 6-8 glasses of water a day).

What are the signs and symptoms of DVT?

If you have any of the following symptoms, please seek medical advice. Contact your surgeon, their practice nurse, your GP or an after-hours medical service.

- Pain and/or swelling in the affected limb.
- Pain which starts in your calf and feels like cramping or soreness.
- Feeling of warmth on the skin around the affected area.
- Change of colour in the leg – bluish, purple or reddish skin colour.

If you are experiencing any of the following symptoms this is an emergency.

Call 111 and ask for an ambulance.

Inform them that you have had surgery and are showing signs of a blood clot.

- Sudden shortness of breath and/or feel pain in your chest
- Coughing up blood-stained mucous

How is a DVT diagnosed?

- Physical examination
- Ultrasound scan
- Blood test

How is a DVT treated?

The main goal of treatment is to prevent the blood clot from getting larger, breaking loose and/or travelling to the lungs and causing a pulmonary embolism (PE).

Treatment usually involves a combination of medication and compression.

Anticoagulant medication:

- Helps “thin” the blood by reducing its ability to clot
- Prevents new clots from forming
- Stops existing clots from growing larger
- Treatment typically continues for at least 3 months to be fully effective

Compression stockings

- Specially designed elastic stockings that support the lower legs
- Improve circulation and help reduce swelling
- May not be suitable for all types of surgery
- Your surgeon will advise whether they are appropriate for you

What will the hospital do to help reduce my risk of a DVT?

We take steps before, during, and after your surgery to help reduce your risk of developing a DVT.

Risk assessment

- We will assess your DVT risk before your admission and again during your hospital stay.
- If you are identified as higher risk, we will create a personalised prevention plan with you.

Compression devices during surgery

- If your surgical procedure is expected to take more than 60 minutes, we will likely use **massaging calf compression sleeves** during your operation.
- These sleeves help keep blood flowing in your lower limbs.
- Depending on your level of risk, you may need to continue using them after surgery until you are up and walking.

Medication review

- Some medications, such as the **oral contraceptive pill** or **hormone replacement therapy (HRT)**, can increase your risk of a DVT.
- Your surgeon will discuss whether you should speak with your GP about temporarily stopping these medications before and/or after surgery.

Anticoagulants (blood thinners)

- Depending on your risk level and the type of surgery you have had, your surgeon may prescribe a short course of anticoagulant medication for you to take at home. Often people refer to this type of medication as “blood thinners”.