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What is deep vein thrombosis (DVT)?

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when a blood clot develops in a vein deep in the body. Deep veins are found within groups of muscles. The veins close to the skin are called superficial veins.

While these clots most often develop in the lower legs or thighs, they may appear in the upper body, such as the arms or other locations in the body. Deep vein thrombosis is a risk for any major surgery, but patients who have surgery of the legs or hips are at higher risk.

Deep vein thrombosis can pose a serious threat to health. Pieces of a clot can break off and travel through the bloodstream to the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism and can be fatal soon after it occurs. Deep vein thrombosis can also block blood flow in the veins, causing the blood to pool. This can cause swelling, pain, and permanent damage to the leg called post-thrombotic syndrome.

What is thrombophlebitis?

When a clot forms in a vein, inflammation of the vein may occur at the affected site. This is referred to as thrombophlebitis. Inflammation may be minimal, or may be more pronounced, causing swelling, redness, warmth, and tenderness at the site. When thrombophlebitis occurs, the body's response to inflammation may promote the formation of more clots. This can lead to the development of chronic venous insufficiency and/or venous stasis ulcers.

What causes DVT?

There are a variety of factors that contribute to the development of DVT:

- surgery, particularly surgery of the hip or leg, or abdominal surgery
- a long period of bed rest or sitting for a long time (e.g., on an airplane or in a car)
- birth control pills or hormones taken for symptoms of menopause
- certain diseases and conditions, such as: varicose veins, chronic atrial fibrillation, inflammatory bowel disease, lupus erythematosus, a disease of the immune system, cancer, heart failure, heart attack, arterial disease, spinal cord injury and resulting, and paralysis
- previous blood clot (thrombosis)
- pregnancy
- intensive care treatment involving

placement of a central venous catheter

What are the symptoms of DVT?

DVT occurs without symptoms about 50 percent of the time. When symptoms do occur, they may include:

- swelling in the leg
- red, discolored, or white skin
- a cord in a leg vein that can be felt
- rapid heart beat (tachycardia)
- slight fever
- warm skin
- more visible surface veins
- dull ache, tightness, tenderness or pain in the leg (these symptoms may only occur while walking or standing)

The symptoms of deep vein thrombosis may resemble other medical conditions or problems. Always consult your physician for a diagnosis.

What are the treatment options for DVT?

Medications: Various types of medications may be used in the treatment of DVT. Although anticoagulants (blood thinners) do not destroy the clots, they may keep the clot from growing and other clots from forming. Another type of medication called thrombolytics ("clot busters") can dissolve a clot quickly, over a period of a few days. Thrombolytics are used in certain situations as determined by a physician.

Vena cava filter: In some cases, a vena cava filter may be inserted into the vena cava (the large vein which returns blood from the body to the heart) of patients who cannot take medication. This is also used if blood thinners are not working. The filter is a kind of "clot catcher", which holds the clots safely to allow the body to breakdown the clots over time.

How can DVT be prevented?

Preventative measures may include:

- tighten calf muscles to force blood to move back up the heart
- getting up and moving as soon as possible after surgery or illness
- a pneumatic compression device
- elastic stockings to reduce swelling and promote circulation
- medications which thin the blood and/or help with circulation

Consult your physician for diagnosis and treatment.



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What is a pulmonary embolism (PE)?

A pulmonary embolism (PE) is a blood clot that develops in a blood vessel elsewhere in the body (most commonly from the leg), travels to an artery in the lung, and forms an occlusion (blockage) of the artery.

What are the symptoms of PE?

The following are the most common symptoms for pulmonary embolism. However, each individual may experience symptoms differently:

- sudden shortness of breath (most common)
- chest pain (usually worse with breathing)
- a feeling of anxiety
- a feeling of dizziness, lightheadedness, or fainting
- palpitations (heart racing)
- coughing up blood (hemoptysis)
- sweating
- low blood pressure

You may or may not have these symptoms should a pulmonary embolism occur. Usually, if a PE is suspected, the physician will check your legs for evidence of a deep vein thrombosis. The symptoms of a pulmonary embolism may resemble other medical conditions or problems. Always consult your physician for a diagnosis.

How is PE treated?

Treatment options for pulmonary embolism include:

pulmonary embolectomy - surgical removal of a pulmonary embolism. This procedure is generally performed only in severe situations in which the PE is very large.

percutaneous thrombectomy - insertion of a catheter (long, thin, hollow tube) to the site of the embolism, using X-ray guidance.

