Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

What is DVT?

A deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a condition in which a blood clot (thrombus) develops in the deep veins of the body. Most often, DVTs develop in the legs, either above the knee or below it. Lack of muscle contractions in the legs can allow blood to collect in the veins of legs and feet. This can lead to thrombus formation.

A DVT can happen to anyone who has mobility problems or has had recent surgery. Conditions that may put you at risk for developing a DVT are: increasing age, hormones, cancer and its treatment, major surgery (abdomen, pelvis, legs, or feet), trauma (fracture of the pelvis, hip, or leg), obesity, prolonged immobility, stroke or paralysis, indwelling central venous catheter, varicose veins, cardiac dysfunction, chronic respiratory failure, and having already had venous thrombus.

DVTs can occur after prolonged bedrest or long trips in a car or plane.

DVTs usually occur in leg or groin blood vessels.
What are the signs and symptoms of DVT?

*The most common signs and symptoms of DVT:*

- Swelling.
- Redness or discoloration.
- Tenderness or pain of the extremity.
- For some, the leg may feel warm.

If you suspect that you have a DVT, call your doctor or come to the Emergency Room.

What are the risks of DVT?

Clots that form in the veins can break apart and travel to other parts of the body, including the lungs. A blood clot in the lungs is called a pulmonary embolism (PE). This type of clot can be life-threatening and must be treated right away.

*Signs and symptoms of pulmonary embolism:*

- Difficulty breathing (shortness of breath).
- Chest pain.
- Rapid heartbeat or fainting.
- Low-grade fever.
- Cough with or without bloody sputum.

*If you have these symptoms, call 9-1-1 right away.*

How can a DVT be prevented?

- Avoid tight clothing, nylons, or socks (especially the type that are too tight at the top and/or leave marks on your skin) that might restrict blood flow through veins.
- Elevate your legs 6 inches above your heart from time to time to help improve blood flow and reduce swelling.
- If elastic stockings (also called compression stockings) or Ace bandages have been prescribed for you, wear them as instructed. While these may feel tight, they are designed to promote circulation and do not pose a risk of cutting off circulation.
- Follow your exercise plan.
Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

- Rehabilitation Clinic: 206-598-4295
- Surgical Specialties Center: 206-598-4549
- 4-Southeast: 206-598-4400
- 4-South: 206-598-4670

- Change your position often. Do not sit or stand for more than 1 hour at a time.
- Reduce sodium (salt) in your diet, as it causes fluid retention.
- Avoid bumping or injuring your legs.
- Avoid crossing your legs.
- Look for unusual or sudden swelling or redness of your legs every day.
- Avoid pillows under your knees.
- If possible, elevate the foot of your bed 4 to 6 inches on blocks or books.
- If your doctor prescribes medicine to decrease the risk of DVT, take it as directed.