

What is a Blood Clot (Deep Vein Thrombosis)?

A blood clot (*deep vein thrombosis or DVT*) can form in a deep vein, often in the calf or thigh. The clot can partially or completely block blood flow and damage blood vessels. If a blood clot breaks free, it can travel to the lungs and cause pulmonary embolus (PE), which can be serious.

Tips to Lower Your Risk of Developing a Blood Clot (DVT)

- Maintain an active lifestyle and exercise regularly. Walking, swimming and biking are all great exercise activities.
- Manage your weight with exercise as well as by eating a healthy diet based on Canada's Food Guide.
- Avoid smoking. Smoking causes vasoconstriction which restricts normal blood flow throughout the body.
- Get your blood pressure checked regularly and take steps to lower it if necessary.
- Speak to your family doctor about any personal or family history of blood clotting problems.
- Discuss the use of birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy with your family doctor before initiating treatment as these can also restrict blood flow in some individuals.

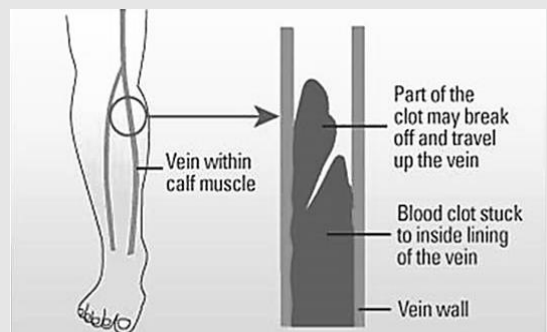
Signs that you may have developed a Blood Clot (DVT)

In your calf or thigh:

- Pain
- Swelling
- Redness
- Warmth

Or generally:

- Shortness of breath
- Palpitations (a skipped, extra or irregular heartbeat)
- Lightheadedness



If you develop any of the above symptoms in the period after surgery or after a long trip, call your doctor or go to the nearest emergency department.

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Preventing the development of a Blood Clot (DVT)

There are a few things you can do to prevent blood clots. Your doctor and nurse will work with you to determine the prevention methods that are right for you.

- Move as soon as possible— If you have just had surgery, get out of bed and move around as soon as **your doctor tells you it is OK to do so**. Ask a nurse or family member to assist you if you feel unsteady.
- Exercises— Exercising your lower leg muscles is important especially when you sit for long periods of time. It decreases the pooling of blood in your legs. Try to do the prevention exercises several times a day, while you are recovering from surgery.
- Compression stockings—Your doctor may prescribe elastic compression stockings to help prevent blood clots.
- Blood thinners—Your doctor may prescribe blood-thinning drugs, also called anticoagulants, after surgery. Blood thinners prevent blood clots but also increase the risk of bleeding.

Blood Clot (DVT) Risk Factors

The risk of developing a blood clot (DVT) is greatest during the 10 days following surgery. Other common risk factors include: Limited mobility, Congestive heart failure, Personal or family history of venous thromboembolism, Smoking, Being overweight, Respiratory failure, Medications such as birth control pills, Age—those who are 40 and older have a greater risk.

Prevention Exercises

There are a few simple exercises you can do to help prevent a blood clot (DVT), particularly in situations when you are immobile for a long time. When recovering from surgery try to do each exercise 10 to 15 times every hour you are awake

Heel lifts—With your feet on the floor, lift your heels as high as possible then put both feet flat on the floor. This keeps your calf muscles working to prevent blood from pooling.

Ankle Pumps – Sit or lay with your feet in front of you and legs straight. Point your toes towards your knees, then point them away from you. Alternate pointing and flexing your feet as far as you can in each direction.



Chair Leg Raises – Keeping your right leg straight slowly lift it off the floor, hold for a moment, then slowly bring it back down. Repeat the movement with your left leg.

