



Wake Forest University School of Medicine
**Women's Health Center of Excellence for Research,
Leadership, Education**

Fact Sheet

Blood Clots

Blood clots are clumps that result from coagulation, or clumping together, of the blood. A blood clot that forms in a vessel or in the heart and remains there is called a *thrombus*. A thrombus that travels from the vessel or heart chamber where it formed to another location in the body is called an *embolus*. Thrombi and emboli can attach to a blood vessel and partially or completely block the flow of blood in that vessel. This blockage deprives the tissues in that location of normal blood flow and oxygen. This is called *ischemia*, and if not treated quickly can cause damage or even death of the tissues in that area. The most serious type of blood clot is called Deep Venous Thrombosis.

Deep Venous Thrombosis

- ▶ A condition where a blood clot forms in a deep vein (a vein accompanying an artery).
- ▶ Most often develops in the lower leg and thigh; can also occur in arm or pelvic veins.

Risks

- ▶ Bed rest or prolonged sitting (such as long plane or car trips)
- ▶ Recent surgery or trauma (especially hip, knee or gynecological surgery)
- ▶ Use of medications such as estrogen/progestin and birth control pills
- ▶ Stroke resulting in paralysis of your arms or legs
- ▶ Have a pacemaker or catheter in a central vein for treatment of a medical condition
- ▶ Family history of a tendency for blood clots
- ▶ Have varicose veins
- ▶ More commonly seen in adults over age 60, but can occur in any age group

Symptoms of Deep Venous Thrombosis

- ▶ If symptoms are present, they often include leg tenderness, pain, swelling, and a fever. When a superficial vein is affected, a red, hard, and tender cord may be present just under the skin surface.

Treatments

- ▶ If the clot is in a superficial vein, your doctor may recommend applying heat to the sore area, elevating the affected area, and taking a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicine.
- ▶ **Medications.** If you have deep vein thrombosis, injection of a blood-thinning (anticoagulant) medication, such as heparin, helps prevent clots from growing. After the heparin treatment, taking the anticoagulant warfarin (Coumadin, Panwarfin) for several months continues to prevent clots from growing. Sometimes, you may need a drug to dissolve the clot.
- ▶ **Support stockings.** These help prevent recurrent swelling and reduce the chance of complications of deep vein thrombosis. Your doctor may recommend prescription-strength support hose.

This information is general. If your doctor tells you something different, follow his or her instructions.

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