

Preventing Blood Clots

While you are in the hospital

At University of Washington Medical Center (UWMC), we do our best to keep patients from getting blood clots. This handout explains what your healthcare providers will do to keep you from getting a blood clot.

What is a DVT?

A deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a blood clot that forms in one of the veins of the body. Most DVTs form in the legs, either above or below the knee.

Health problems linked with DVTs include *pulmonary embolisms* (blood clots in the lungs) and *venous thromboembolism* (a medical term for blood clots).

What causes a DVT?

DVTs can occur:

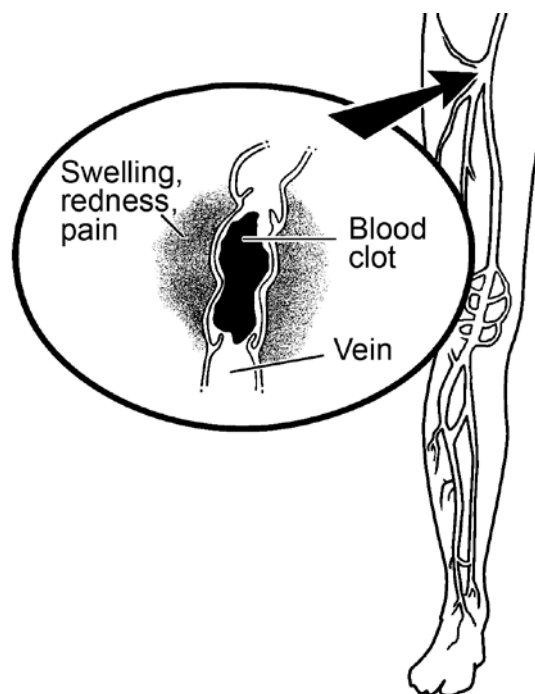
- After surgery or an injury
- From being inactive for a long time when in the hospital or bedridden
- After long trips in a car or plane

The risk of getting a DVT can be increased by some diseases or by taking medicines that increase the risk of blood clotting. DVTs may also occur without a clear cause.

What are the signs of DVT?

DVT most often occurs in a leg or arm. The most common signs include:

- Swelling
- Pain or tenderness
- Redness or odd coloring in your skin



This drawing shows a DVT in a leg vein.

Why is it important to prevent blood clots?

We take preventing DVTs very seriously. This is because:

- DVTs are common in patients who have had surgery or are in the hospital and cannot move very much.
- DVTs can cause pain and can increase the risk of getting another blood clot in the future.
- When DVTs occur, extra treatment is needed, which can make your stay in the hospital longer.
- If a DVT is not treated right away, clots in the legs can break apart and travel to other parts of the body. A blood clot that travels to the lungs is called a *pulmonary embolism* (PE). This type of clot can be life-threatening because it cuts off the blood supply to the lungs.

How do healthcare providers help prevent blood clots?

If you are in the hospital for a long time, or if you are admitted to the hospital after surgery, your healthcare providers will use one or more methods to prevent blood clots. These include:

Blood-thinning Medicines

You may receive medicine to prevent blood clots. This medicine may be:

- Given as an injection under your skin – common injectable medicines are *heparin* and *enoxaparin* (brand name Lovenox)
- Taken as a pill 1 to 2 times a day – common types are warfarin (Coumadin), apixaban (Eliquis), and rivaroxaban (Xarelto)

Sequential Compression Devices

Sequential compression devices (SCDs) are wraps that are put around your legs. From time to time, you will feel the SCDs inflate with air, then deflate. This imitates the action of walking and helps prevent blood clots.

If you are having surgery at UWMC, these wraps will be put on your legs and turned on before you go into the operating room.



SCDs are leg wraps that inflate with air from time to time.

Walking

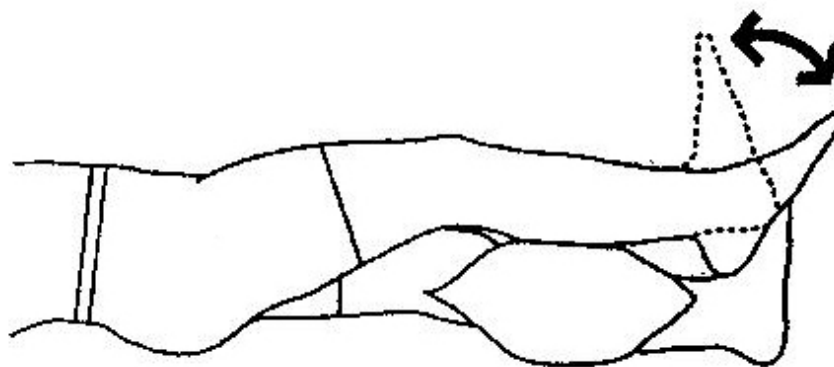
Walking soon after surgery can help prevent blood clots. But, walking by itself is not enough to prevent a blood clot when you are in the hospital. It is best if you can walk while also using other ways of preventing blood clots, such as wearing SCDs or taking blood-thinning medicines.

Ask your doctor or nurse what method to prevent blood clots is being used for you.

What can you do to prevent blood clots?

You are an important member of your care team. Here are things you can do to help prevent blood clots:

- **If you have any signs of DVT (see page 1), tell your nurse or doctor right away.**
- Take any blood-thinning medicine that has been ordered for you.
- Wear your SCDs any time you are in bed or up in a chair.
- Get out of bed and walk in the halls as soon and as much as you can.
- Before you get out of bed, ask for help removing your SCDs.
- If you are on *fall precautions*, ask for help before you get out of bed.
- Do this simple exercises 10 times every hour while you are awake (see drawing below):
 - Point your toes toward the end of the bed
 - Then point your toes up toward your head



Do this simple exercise while you are in bed to help prevent DVTs.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.