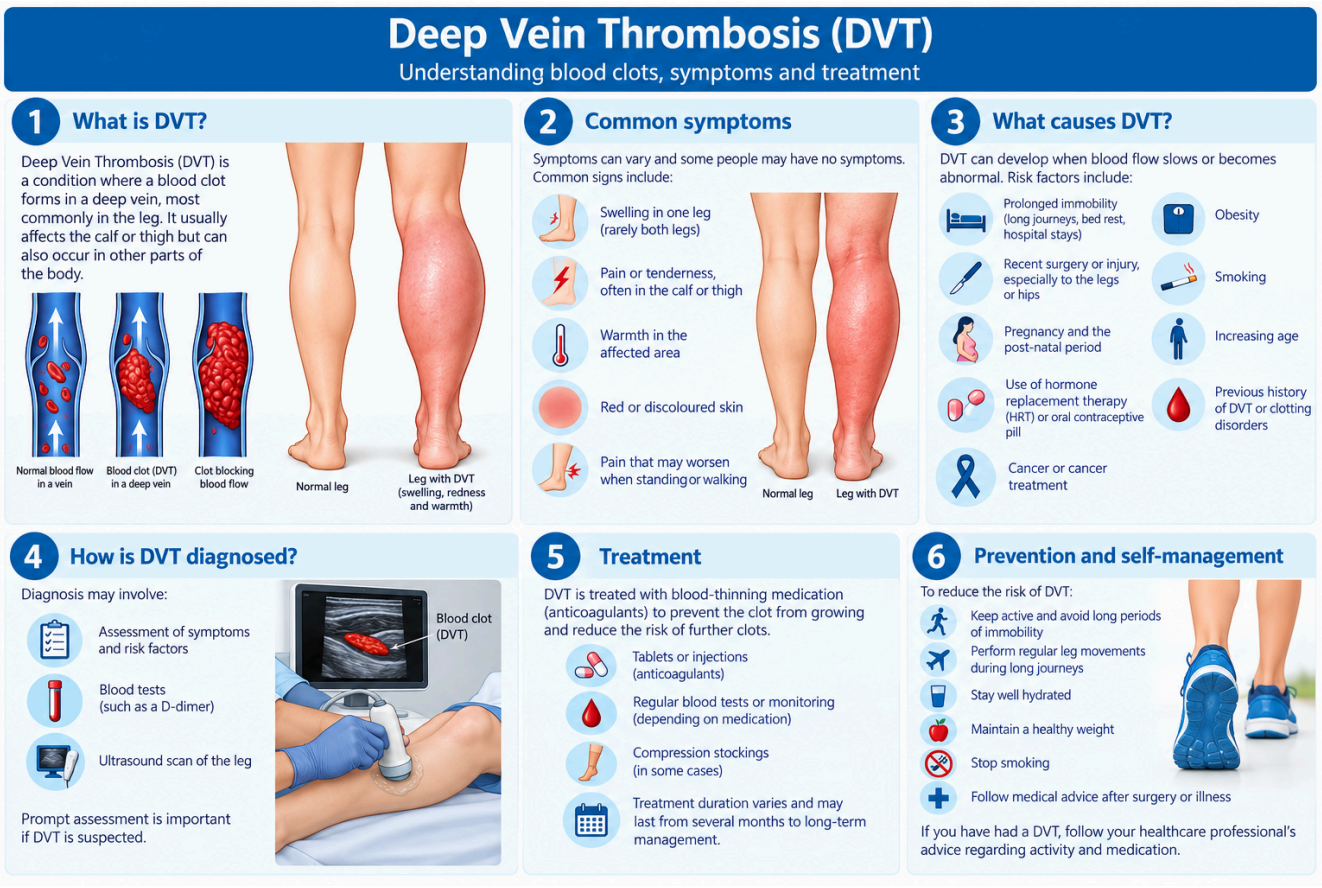
Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

Understanding blood clots, symptoms and treatment

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)

A guide to recognising symptoms and seeking help



What is deep vein thrombosis?

Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is a condition where a blood clot forms in a deep vein, most commonly in the leg. It usually affects the calf or thigh but can occur in other parts of the body.

Why is DVT important?

A clot can sometimes travel to the lungs, causing a pulmonary embolism (PE), which requires urgent medical treatment.

Symptoms, risk factors and diagnosis

Recognising possible DVT and getting assessed promptly

1. Common symptoms

Swelling in one leg (rarely both); pain or tenderness in the calf or thigh; warmth; red or discoloured skin; and pain that may worsen with standing or walking. Some people have no symptoms.

2. What causes DVT?

DVT can develop when blood flow slows or becomes abnormal. Risk factors include prolonged immobility, recent surgery or injury, pregnancy or the post-natal period, hormone treatments, cancer, obesity, smoking, increasing age and previous DVT or clotting disorders.

3. How is DVT diagnosed?

Assessment of symptoms and risk factors, blood tests such as D-dimer, and an ultrasound scan of the leg may be used.

4. Seek urgent assessment

If you develop swelling, pain or redness in one leg, contact your GP or NHS 111 urgently. Prompt assessment is important if DVT is suspected.

Important information

Symptoms may develop gradually or suddenly. DVT is serious but treatable, and early diagnosis can reduce complications.

Treatment and prevention

Managing DVT and reducing future risk

DVT: gentle movement and rehabilitation

Once a clinician has assessed your DVT and advised that movement is safe, gentle leg exercises and walking may support recovery. Follow your individual treatment plan.



Treatment and recovery

Take anticoagulant medication exactly as prescribed. Monitoring and compression stockings may be recommended for some people. Do not stop medication without medical advice.

Exercise safely · important

Do not start or increase exercise until advised it is safe by your treating clinician. Seek urgent assessment for new or worsening leg swelling or pain. Call 999 for sudden breathlessness, chest pain, coughing blood or collapse.

Warning signs and next steps

When to seek help and important reminders

Emergency: possible pulmonary embolism

Call 999 or attend A&E immediately for sudden shortness of breath, chest pain (especially when breathing in), coughing up blood, or sudden collapse or faintness. These can be signs of a pulmonary embolism.

When should I seek medical advice?

Contact your GP or NHS 111 urgently if you develop swelling, pain or redness in one leg; symptoms worsen or do not improve; or you are concerned about medication side effects.

Key messages

DVT is serious but treatable. Early diagnosis and treatment reduce complications. Keep active and manage risk factors where possible. Seek urgent help for symptoms of pulmonary embolism.

Questions or concerns?

If you have concerns or questions, please speak to your healthcare professional.

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