

### What is a family history of vein disease?

You have a family history of vein disease if your parent, brother, sister, or child has been diagnosed with [blood clots in the veins](#) (DVT or pulmonary embolism) or varicose veins. A family history of vein disease increases your risk of developing the disease.

See also:

[Family History & PAD Risk](#)

[Family History & Heart Risk](#)

[Family History & Stroke Risk](#)

### How does my family history affect my vein disease risk?

Women with a family history of blood clots in the veins or [chronic vein disease](#) are at increased risk of developing these conditions. This is because vein disease risk is affected by genetic and environmental factors that family members often share. Genes you inherit from your parents and share with your brothers and sisters can predispose you to conditions that put you at risk for vein disease, such as

[diabetes](#)

and

[inherited blood clotting problems](#)

. In addition, families often share unhealthy lifestyle habits such as

[smoking](#)

, or a lack of exercise and poor diet that can lead to

[excess body fat](#)

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Women with a family history of DVT or PE have an increased risk of developing blood clots in the veins. A study of 3,764 patients (half were women) found that women whose parent or sibling had suffered a DVT or PE had more than twice the normal risk.<sup>1</sup> The risk was even higher the more relatives were affected, and the younger the affected family member was. Women and men who had multiple affected relatives, at least one of whom was younger than 50, had more than four times the normal risk. Some of the family risk of blood clots was due to

known blood clotting problems that are passed on through genes. However, in 70% of cases the cause of the inherited risk was unknown.

Chronic vein disease and varicose veins (an early sign of vein disease) are also more likely to occur in women who have a family history of vein disease.<sup>2</sup> The more close relatives you have with vein disease, the higher your risk of developing it.

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Estimates of how much varicose vein risk is due to heredity vary widely. One study found that women with varicose veins were nearly 5 times as likely as women without them to report a family history of varicose veins.

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However, women with a family history only had a 1.8-fold increased risk of developing varicose veins in the future. This indicates that some of the apparent link between family history and varicose veins may be because women who develop varicose veins are more likely to investigate and discover that a close relative also had the condition.

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Varicose veins mark the early stages of vein disease, but the more serious forms of vein disease also appear to be affected by family history. One study found that having a mother with [chronic venous insufficiency](#) (CVI), an advanced form of vein disease, increased a person's risk of developing leg ulcers nearly 7-fold.

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### **Why is family history important if I cannot change it?**

Even though you cannot change your family history, it is important for women with a family history of vein disease to lower their risk by focusing on the risk factors they can change. Most women with a family history of vein disease have at least one other risk factor that they can control. Risk factors are often inherited, and knowing which ones run in your family can help you target those for which you are at highest risk.

If you have a family history of DVT or PE, you can also take steps to avoid triggering a DVT. Women with a family history of blood clotting problems who develop blood clots may need tests to see if an inherited problem could be the cause. Your doctor may also recommend medication to prevent blood clots during high-risk situations, such as during pregnancy, surgery, or long

hospital stays. See [Blood Clotting Problems & Vein Disease Risk](#) for more.

Recording your family history is an important step towards controlling your vein disease risk and protecting your cardiovascular health. One large survey found that although 96% of people believe that family history is important for their own health, fewer than 30% have collected health information from their relatives to develop a family health history.<sup>7</sup>

### How do I record a family health history?

Several online tools can help you collect and organize a useful family history. The US Surgeon General's [My Family Health Portrait](#) allows you to create and print a personalized family health history report. See the links below for more information and tips on how to collect your family history.

### For More Information:

[National Society of Genetic Counselors: Family History](#)  
[US Surgeon General's Family History Initiative](#)  
[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Family History](#)

### References

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