

[Deep Vein Thrombosis](#), or DVT, is the formation of one or more blood clots in the body's large veins, usually in the lower leg or calf. These clots can partially or completely block the vein, causing pain, swelling, and tenderness. See [Signs of Blood Clots in the Legs](#) for more.

One in three women and men with DVT suffer a serious complication called *pulmonary embolism* (PE). This happens when part of the DVT breaks off and travels through the bloodstream, eventually blocking an artery that supplies blood to the lungs. PE is extremely serious and often causes sudden death.

If you have a DVT, treatment is aimed at stopping the clot from growing and new clots from forming, and preventing the clot from traveling to the lungs and causing a pulmonary embolism.

Treatment for DVT and pulmonary embolism may include:

- [Blood-thinning drugs](#) to stop the clot from growing and new clots from forming
- [Clot-busting drugs](#) to break up a pulmonary embolism or large DVT
- [Compression therapies](#) to improve blood flow in the legs and prevent new clots from forming
- In rare cases, [other treatments](#) may be used to break up or prevent blood clots in women who cannot take blood thinners or have had repeated clots despite treatment

Blood Thinning Drugs

Blood thinning drugs are the main treatment for [deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism](#). These medications, also called *anti coagulants*, stop the clot from growing and prevent new clots from forming. Your body will break down and reabsorb any existing clots on its own.

Common blood thinning drugs used to treat and prevent DVT and pulmonary embolism include:

- [Low Molecular Weight Heparin](#)
- [Heparin](#)
- [Warfarin](#)

See our article on [Drugs to Treat Blood Clots in the Veins](#) to learn more about these medications and how they are used.

Clot Busting Drugs

In most cases, blood thinners are the only treatment that is needed because your body can break down and reabsorb blood clots on its own. However, your doctor may decide to speed up this process using a type of medication called clot-busters (*thrombolytics*), especially if you have a large clot that is causing heart or breathing problems.

The most common type of clot-busting drug used to treat DVT and PE is called *tissue plasminogen activator* (tPA). tPA is also sometimes used to break up clots that have caused a stroke or heart attack. [Click here](#) to learn more about how these drugs work and who might receive them.

Compression Therapies

[Compression stockings](#) are special socks that improve blood flow in the leg veins and prevent blood from pooling in the legs. Because slow-flowing blood is more likely to form clots, compression stockings are a simple, inexpensive way to prevent blood clots. If you have had a DVT or pulmonary embolism, you should wear compression stockings for at least a year to prevent [chronic vein disease](#). Compression stockings are also used to prevent DVT in women at risk for clots after certain types of surgery or during long travel.

Some women may benefit from a stronger form of leg compression called [Intermittent Pneumatic Compression](#)

(IPC), in which a pump machine and inflatable leggings are used to provide pulsing pressure that pushes blood through the veins.

Other Treatments

Some women cannot take blood thinners or clot-busting drugs because they have other conditions that put them at risk for dangerous bleeding, a potential side effect of these medications. These women may need different treatments to break up clots and treat or prevent pulmonary embolism. Alternative treatments may also be used in women who suffer from repeated blood clot problems while taking blood-thinning medication.

Alternative treatments for DVT or pulmonary embolism are rarely necessary, and are only used after other treatments have failed or cannot be performed. They include:

- **Catheter-directed thrombolysis** – a treatment to dissolve blood clots by injecting clot-busting drugs directly onto the clot. The medication is delivered through a long, thin tube called a catheter that is inserted into the blood vessels and guided to the location of the clot. Because only a small amount of the drug is used in a specific area, the risks of excess bleeding are lower.
- **Blood clot removal (*embolectomy*)** – a procedure to physically remove a blood clot, often a pulmonary embolism that is causing heart or breathing problems. Embolectomy can be performed with a surgical procedure or through a long, thin tube called a catheter inserted into the arteries.
- **Vena cava filter** – a procedure to prevent pulmonary embolism in which a permanent filter is implanted into the *vena cava*, a large vein that takes blood from the body back into the heart. A vena cava filter cannot prevent DVT, but it can catch any blood clots that travel up from the legs, preventing them from reaching the lungs.

Learn More:

- See [Am I At Risk for DVT](#) to learn how to evaluate your risk for deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism
- See [Preventing DVT: The Basics](#) for steps you can take to prevent blood clots in

high-risk situations, such as after surgery, during long hospital stays, or during long-distance travel

- See [Symptoms of Vein Disease](#) to learn how to recognize the symptoms of deep vein thrombosis and pulmonary embolism

- See [Diagnosis of Deep Vein Thrombosis & Pulmonary Embolism](#) to learn about tests used to diagnose blood clots in the veins and lungs

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