

DVT: The common, yet often silent killer

Obesity. Smoking. High blood pressure. Almost everyone knows these are hazards to your health. But did you know that dehydration, a recent pregnancy, prolonged immobility, varicose veins, and birth control pills can also trigger a life-threatening condition that kills more people annually than breast cancer and AIDS combined? **Deep vein thrombosis (DVT)** is a public health threat that affects up to two million Americans each year. Yet, surprisingly, many people have little or no awareness of this condition or know how to recognize its signs and symptoms.

DVT occurs when a blood clot forms in one of the large veins, usually in the legs, leading to either partially or completely blocked circulation. If left untreated, this clot has the potential to move into the lungs and **create a pulmonary embolism** requiring immediate medical attention. Although preventable, almost 300,000 die annually from DVT and its primary complication, pulmonary embolism.

Fortunately, if caught in time, DVT is completely treatable. **The classic signs of DVT, especially if it occurs in the lower extremities, are pain, swelling, tenderness, and redness or discoloration of the skin.**

The bad news is that, about half of the time, DVT has no symptoms at all. By the time you show symptoms of a pulmonary embolism, it might be too late for you to receive emergency care. **Typical symptoms of a pulmonary embolism are: Shortness of breath, rapid pulse, sweating, sharp chest pain that worsens with deep breathing, low blood pressure, unconsciousness and coughing up blood.**

The first and most important step in protecting yourself from a potentially fatal DVT is to know whether you are at risk. Please flip over this brochure and take the DVT Risk Assessment Tool. Then, be sure to talk over the test results with your doctor to determine what you can do to protect yourself from a future DVT.

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DVT Tragedy: David Bloom's silent killer

In April 2003, NBC war correspondent David Bloom was a casualty at the age of 39 – not due to his coverage of the war in Iraq, but due to a pulmonary embolism originating from a blood clot in his leg called deep vein thrombosis or DVT. Prior to collapsing, Bloom had spent days cramped and overheated in an M88 tank recovery vehicle while he broadcasted up-to-the-minute war coverage.

DVT is often referred to as “economy-class syndrome” or “traveler’s thrombosis” because long flights in coach cabins occasionally have led to DVT-related fatalities. Extended restricted inactivity can cause blood to pool in the legs’ deep veins, setting the stage for dangerous clotting.

Prior to covering the war, Bloom was an avid exerciser and an active father and husband. According to Bloom’s wife in a newspaper interview, Bloom “had been to Somalia and Bosnia, and covered a lot of the hot spots in the world. He took extreme cautions to be safe: He had Pentagon training; he had biological warfare chemical training; he was wearing a full-body chemical suit, a flak jacket, a helmet, land-mine jacket, boots. The irony of it is the enemy was within.”

Please flip page to take the DVT Risk Assessment Tool

Save a life and pass this along. Copying is permissible.

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Are You at Risk for DVT?

Complete this Risk Assessment Tool to find out.

Name _____

Today's Date _____

Only your doctor can decide if you are at risk for Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT), a blood clot that forms in one of the deep veins of your legs. A review of your personal history may determine if you are at risk for developing this condition. Take a moment to complete this form for yourself (or complete it for someone you love). Then be sure to talk with your doctor about your risk for DVT and what you can do to help protect against it. Your doctor may want to keep a copy in your file for future reference.

Directions:

1. Check all statements that apply to you.
2. Enter the number of points for each of your checked statements in the space at right.
3. Add up all points to reach your total DVT Risk Score. Then, share your completed form with your doctor.

Add 1 point for each of the following statements that apply:

- Age 41– 59 years _____
- Minor surgery within the last month _____
- Major surgery in the past _____
- Varicose veins _____
- A history of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) (for example, Crohn's disease or ulcerative colitis) _____
- Legs are currently swollen _____
- Overweight or obese (BMI > 30) _____
- Heart attack within the last month _____
- Congestive Heart Failure within the last month _____
- Serious infection (for example, pneumonia) within the last month _____
- Lung disease (for example, emphysema or COPD) _____
- Currently on bed rest or restricted mobility _____
- Past malignancy _____
- Tube in blood vessel in neck or chest that delivers blood or medicine directly to heart within the last month (also called central venous access) _____

For women only: Add 1 point for each of the following statements that apply:

- Current use of birth control or Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) _____
- Pregnant or had a baby within the last month _____

Add 2 points for each of the following statements that apply:

- Age 60–74 years _____
- Past malignancy (excluding breast and skin cancers) _____
- Major surgery that lasted longer than 45 minutes within the last month _____
- Laparoscopic surgery that lasted longer than 45 minutes within the last month (surgery performed through a small incision with a lighted, tube-shaped instrument) _____
- Plaster cast that has kept you from moving your limb within the last month _____

Add 3 points for each of the following statements that apply:

- Age 75 or over _____
- History of blood clots, either Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) or Pulmonary Embolism (PE) _____
- Family history of blood clots (thrombosis) _____
- Family history of blood-clotting disorders _____
- Current cancer or chemotherapy _____

Add 5 points for each of the following statements that apply:

- Elective hip or knee joint replacement surgery within the last month _____
- Broken hip, pelvis, or leg within the last month _____
- Serious trauma within the last month (for example, a fall, broken bone, or car accident) _____
- Spinal cord injury resulting in paralysis within the last month _____

Add up all your points to get your total DVT Risk Score

What does your DVT Risk Score mean?

Risk scores may indicate your odds of developing a DVT during major surgery or while being hospitalized for a serious illness. Airplane passengers who fly over 5 hours may also be at risk for DVT.

Studies have shown if you have 0-2 risk factors, your DVT risk is small. This risk increases with the presence of more risk factors. This information should be shared with your doctor who can determine your DVT risk by evaluating all of these factors.