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Diagnosis

DVT can be difficult to diagnose, especially if the patient has no symptoms. Diagnosis is also challenging because of the similarities between symptoms of DVT and those of other conditions, such as a pulled muscle, an infection, a clot in the superficial vein (thrombophlebitis), a fracture and arthritis. If DVT is suspected, the doctor will immediately send the patient to a vascular laboratory or hospital for testing, which may include a blood test, Doppler Ultrasound, venogram, MRI or angiogram.

Treatment of DVT

If tests indicate a clot is present, the doctor will make a recommendation regarding treatment. Depending on the location of the clot, the patient may need hospitalization. Medical or surgical care will be managed by a team of physicians, which may include a primary care physician, internist, vascular (blood vessel) surgeon or hematologist (blood disease specialist).

Treatment may include:

- Medication: a blood thinning medication is usually prescribed to help prevent additional clots from forming
- Compression stockings: wearing fitted hosiery decreases pain and swelling
- Surgery: a surgical procedure performed by a vascular specialist may be required

Complications of DVT

An early and extremely serious complication of DVT is pulmonary embolism. A pulmonary embolism develops if the clot breaks loose and travels to the lung. Symptoms of a pulmonary embolism include:

- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Coughing up blood

A long term consequence of DVT is damage to the vein from the clot. This damage often results in persistent swelling, pain and discoloration of the leg.

Preventive Measures

For those who have risk factors of DVT, these strategies may reduce the likelihood of developing a blood clot:

- Take blood-thinning medication, if prescribed
- Reduce risk factors that can be changed. For example, stop smoking and lose excess weight
- During periods of prolonged immobility, such as on long trips:
 - Exercise legs every 2-3 hours to get the blood flowing back to the heart. Walk up and down the aisle of a plane or train, rotate ankles while sitting and take regular breaks on road trips
 - Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids, avoid alcohol and caffeine
 - Consider wearing compression stockings