



# Venous thromboembolism (VTE)

## Blood clots and how to prevent them

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You have been given this fact sheet because you are at risk of developing a venous thromboembolism (VTE), or blood clot. Here, we explain what a blood clot is and what you can do to prevent one forming.

### What is a venous thromboembolism?

A venous thromboembolism (VTE) is a blood clot that forms in the veins carrying blood back to your heart.

There are two main types:

1. Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) – a blood clot that forms in the vein of your leg, arm or groin
2. Pulmonary embolism (PE) – a blood clot that breaks off, travels in the bloodstream, and gets lodged in the lungs.

You should get medical treatment if you have any symptoms of a blood clot. In severe cases, they can be life-threatening.

### Who is at higher risk of a blood clot?

There are many reasons why you might be more likely to develop a blood clot.

You are at higher risk if you:

- have had major surgery
- are over 60 years old
- are overweight, body mass index (BMI) over 30
- are a smoker
- have cancer, heart disease or an inherited blood disorder
- are taking menopausal hormone therapy (MHT) or oral contraceptives
- have reduced mobility
- are pregnant or recently gave birth
- have had a blood clot before or someone in your family has had a blood clot.

### Symptoms of a DVT

If you have a DVT, you may notice one or more of the following symptoms. This can happen in one or both legs.

- Pain or tenderness in the calf or leg.
- Swelling, redness, or changes in skin colour.
- A feeling of warmth in the calf or leg.

In some cases, there may be no obvious symptoms, and you may not realise that you have a DVT.

### Symptoms of a PE

If a blood clot travels to your lungs, you are more likely to know that something is wrong.

You may notice one or more of the following:

- chest pain
- shortness of breath and rapid breathing
- coughing, sometimes with blood
- a fast or racing heartbeat
- unusual tiredness
- feeling feverish.

**If you have any of the above symptoms, get medical help immediately.**

For mild symptoms, see your local doctor and tell them your recent medical history.

For severe symptoms, Call Triple Zero (000) or go to your local Emergency Department.

## Pregnancy-related blood clots

VTE occurs in just over 1 in every 1,000 births. The highest risk period is after you have given birth, particularly in the first week.

During this period, blood flow can slow down or pool due to:

- hormonal changes
- pressure on blood vessels from your growing baby
- long periods of rest or reduced movement during pregnancy or after birth
- injury to veins during birth.

### As well as the general risk factors mentioned above, before birth you are at risk if you:

- are over 35 years of age
- have already had three or more babies
- have varicose veins
- have pre-eclampsia
- are having IVF
- are having twins (or more)
- have an active medical condition e.g. heart disease, lung disease, thrombophilia, inflammatory bowel disease, systemic lupus erythematosus or cancer.

### After birth you are at risk if you:

- had a caesarean birth or birth using forceps or vacuum cap
- have a preterm delivery (before 37 weeks) or have had a stillbirth in this pregnancy
- had a prolonged labour (more than 24 hours)
- had a post-partum haemorrhage or needed a blood transfusion
- needed blood thinning medicine during pregnancy
- had very limited movement or a long hospital stay (3 days or more).

## How can you prevent a blood clot?

You will receive care during and after your hospital stay to help prevent blood clots. Your healthcare team will assess your risk and plan your care.

### At home

When you get home from hospital, take the following steps to help reduce the chance of developing a blood clot.

- Stay active and avoid sitting for long periods - try to move at least once an hour during the day.
- While seated, do heel-toe lifts to help blood flow in your legs.
- Stay well hydrated (unless your doctor has advised otherwise).
- Stop smoking and limit alcohol.
- Wear compression stockings (if your doctor has recommended this).

### Medicines

- Your doctor may also prescribe medicines to help prevent blood clots. These are called *anticoagulants*.
- These can be either oral tablets (taken by mouth) or injections (a type of low-molecular-weight heparin) into your tummy or thigh.
- Your doctor will let you know if you need to take an anticoagulant and which one to take.

## For more information

### **Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care**

<https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/publications-and-resources/resource-library/venous-thromboembolism-clinical-care-standard-consumer-fact-sheet>

### **Thrombosis & Haemostasis society of Australia and New Zealand**

<https://www.thanz.org.au/education-training/patient-information-leaflets/>

### **healthdirect**

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/surgery/reducing-your-risk-of-developing-a-blood-clot>

## Do you need an interpreter?



You can ask for an interpreter if you need one.

## Family Violence Support

### **1800 Respect National Helpline**

You can get help if you have experienced sexual assault, domestic or family violence and abuse.

You can call any time of day or night.

1800 737 732

[1800respect.org.au](http://1800respect.org.au)

**Disclaimer:** This fact sheet provides general information only. For specific advice about your healthcare needs, you should seek advice from your health professional. The Royal Women's Hospital does not accept any responsibility for loss or damage arising from your reliance on this fact sheet instead of seeing a health professional. If you require urgent medical attention, please contact your nearest emergency department.

**Reference:** Queensland Clinical Guidelines. VTE prophylaxis in pregnancy and the puerperium Guideline No. MN25.9-V8-R30. Queensland Health. 2025. Available from: <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/qcg> (accessed January 2026).

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