

Who Is at Risk for Venous Thromboembolism?

Venous thromboembolism (VTE) can affect men and women of all ages, races and ethnicities. However, things such as your medical conditions, age and family history can increase your risk. People at the highest risk should ask their health care team how to prevent VTE.



What are the common causes of VTE?

VTE is caused by changes in blood flow most often triggered by:

- Major surgery
- Inflammation
- Long periods of restricted or limited movement

What are other risk factors for VTE?

Certain medical conditions can increase your risk of having a VTE. Some of these include:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Sickle cell disease
- Heart conditions such as heart attacks, high blood pressure or heart failure
- Infections such as COVID-19
- Kidney disease
- Obesity

Other risk factors include:

- **Prior VTE** — Having a previous VTE puts you at risk for having another.
- **Family history** — You can inherit a tendency for blood clotting from your parents, which doubles your risk. If a sibling of yours has had a VTE, that means your risk of having inherited this tendency is higher.

- **Prolonged physical inactivity** — Not moving for long periods due to injury, surgery or travel.
- **Age** — The risk of VTE rises with age, doubling nearly every 10 years after the age of 40.
- **Sex** — Factors like pregnancy and use of hormones, such as birth control pills and estrogen therapy for menopause, increase the risk of blood clotting, which increases women's risk for VTE.
- **Smoking** — Research shows that smoking increases your risk of VTE.

What are the warning signs of VTE?

There are two types of VTE, deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE). DVT is when a blood clot forms in a deep vein, often in the lower leg, thigh or pelvis. A pulmonary embolism happens when a blood clot breaks free from the vein and moves through the bloodstream to the lungs.

DVT mainly affects the large veins in the lower leg and thigh, usually on one side of the body. It can cause:

- Pain or tenderness in the thigh or calf
- Leg swelling
- Muscle cramping or aching
- Warm skin
- Reddish skin color or streaks

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Symptoms of PE include:

- Unexplained shortness of breath
- Rapid breathing
- Chest pain below the ribs that often worsens with deep breaths
- A fast heartbeat
- Feeling lightheaded or fainting
- Coughing with or without blood
- Feelings of anxiety or dread
- Increased sweating

How can I avoid a VTE?

Be proactive. Ask your health care professional for a VTE risk assessment. Risk can be assessed by gathering information about your age, weight, medical history, medications and lifestyle factors.

If you're at risk for VTE, you may be prescribed blood-thinning medications. If you are hospitalized or have surgery, you should wear compression stockings or use a sleeve/boot that fills with air to promote blood flow to your feet and legs. Getting out of bed quickly after surgery is also advised if possible.



HOW CAN I LEARN MORE?

- 1 Call 1-800-AHA-USA1 (1-800-242-8721) or visit [heart.org](https://www.heart.org) to learn more about heart disease and stroke.
- 2 Sign up for our monthly *Heart Insight* e-news for heart patients and their families at [HeartInsight.org](https://www.heartinsight.org).
- 3 Connect with others sharing similar journeys with heart disease and stroke by joining our Support Network at [heart.org/SupportNetwork](https://www.heart.org/SupportNetwork).

Do you have questions for your doctor or nurse?

Take a few minutes to write your own questions for the next time you see your health care professional.

For example:

Am I at risk for VTE?

What changes can I make to prevent it?

MY QUESTIONS:

We have many other fact sheets to help you make healthier choices to reduce your risk for heart disease, manage your condition or care for a loved one. Visit [heart.org/AnswersByHeart](https://www.heart.org/AnswersByHeart) to learn more.