

Prevention of Deep Venous Thrombosis

DVT or blood clots in your vascular system can be life threatening if they occlude a vessel to your heart, brain, or lungs. Pregnancy, obesity, smoking, immobilization, cancer, and recent surgery are all risk factors for developing a blood clot. The incidence of a venous blood clot in pregnancy is 0.5-3 per 1000 pregnancies, and it occurs equally in all trimesters. The hormone shifts of pregnancy change the production of substances that promote and dissolve blood clots leading to thickened blood, or hypercoagulation. Because of the expanded blood volume during pregnancy, blood moves through the veins less rapidly leading to a state called venous stasis. You can imagine how blood that moves slowly is more likely to clot.

The signs of a blood clot in the leg include asymmetric swelling, warmth, and discomfort of one leg. Because of the way the pregnant uterus tips, DVT is more likely in the left leg than the right. A clot to your heart will cause a heart attack causing chest pain, shortness of breath, sweating, or nausea. A clot to your lungs can also cause chest pain and shortness of breath. These pulmonary clots can cause particular pain while taking a deep breath. A clot to your brain can cause obvious stroke symptoms or just a persistent headache.

During pregnancy, you can be proactive about preventing DVT. First and foremost, stay active. Avoid sitting still for long periods of time. At work or home, get up and walk around every hour or two. If you are forced to sit, like in jury duty or on an airplane, exercise your lower calf muscles by alternately pressing your toes and then your heels into the floor. On car trips, stop and walk around for 10 -15 minutes for every hour of driving. Avoid large amounts of foods high in Vitamin K like soybean, soybean oil, canola, and dark green vegetables. Balance is the key with vegetables. Vitamin K is used by the liver to thicken the blood. Do not smoke. Smoking increases your clotting risk further. Control blood pressure by reducing stress and salt intake. If you are on medicines for blood pressure, address the dosage with your pregnancy doctor at frequent intervals as dosing often changes during each trimester. If your doctor puts you on bedrest, ask about compression stockings that can help prevent DVT while you do what's best for your baby.

Non-pregnant people can also wear compression stockings. With your doctor's permission, most non-pregnant people who feel they are at risk can also take a daily aspirin to lower their risk.