

PREVENTING DVT IN THE HOSPITAL

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Deep vein thrombosis is a serious condition that can occur when you are not moving around a lot – for example, when you are in the hospital. The good news is, hospitals have many prevention strategies that can work together to help you avoid DVT. Talk to your healthcare provider about what you can do to reduce your risk.

Start by increasing your blood circulation. There are several ways to do this, even as you recover from injury, illness or surgery. You may be able to raise your legs and feet slightly to help your blood flow. Ask a nurse to help you position properly.

Your healthcare provider may recommend that you wear special long socks, called compression stockings, to increase the circulation in your legs. Unlike the socks or stockings you normally wear, compression stockings use a stronger elastic to create pressure in your legs, ankles and feet. They are usually tighter at the ankles and less tight towards the knees and thighs, to prevent the blood from collecting deep inside your vessels.

Your healthcare provider may also recommend you wear sequential compression devices, or SCDs, that pump air to automatically apply and relieve pressure to your legs in order to help your blood get moving. Some people call these leg pumps, and many patients say that it feels like getting a continuous massage.

As soon as possible in your hospital stay, staff will help you increase your physical activity. Increased movement gets the blood circulating so it cannot pool and form a clot. You may be surprised at how quickly you can get moving.

When you are ready to begin, start with small movements. Lower body exercises, like leg lifts and ankle rotations, are small movements that can get your blood circulating.

Change positions in bed often, at least every 2 hours. This also helps to get the blood moving. Do your bed exercises to build your strength to get into a sitting position.

Soon you will be ready to get out of bed. Until you are strong enough, ask hospital staff for help getting into and out of bed, and moving from your bed to a chair. You may even need help for short trips, like to the restroom.

When you are strong enough, go for short walks down the hallway. Use the handrails for support.

Always wear shoes or socks with treads so your feet can grip the floor giving you added support. This can help you avoid slips and falls.

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Have family members, friends or caregivers walk with you until you feel strong and steady enough to go on your own. They can help support you and give you someone to talk to at the same time.

Be sure to listen to your body and your healthcare provider. You are healing and still need to regain your full strength. Do not start any new activities without talking to your healthcare provider first. If you tire out while walking or doing any exercise, take a rest. But remember to walk short distances several times a day to reduce your risk of DVT.

If moving causes you pain, talk to your healthcare provider about pain management. You do not want pain to stop you from enjoying the benefits of physical activity while in the hospital.

To further reduce your risk of DVT, your healthcare provider may prescribe blood thinners, also called anticoagulant medications. These medications prevent your blood from clotting too much.

Anticoagulant medications are normally only needed for a short time while you are getting your strength back, and are usually given as an injection in your stomach or through your IV.

There are several different anticoagulant medications, but no matter which one you are prescribed, they are all powerful. Take them only as directed.

As you recover from illness, injury or surgery, taking steps to prevent deep vein thrombosis can not only decrease your risk of DVT, but can also help speed your recovery and improve your health overall. Follow your healthcare provider's instructions to protect your blood vessels, and avoid this serious complication.