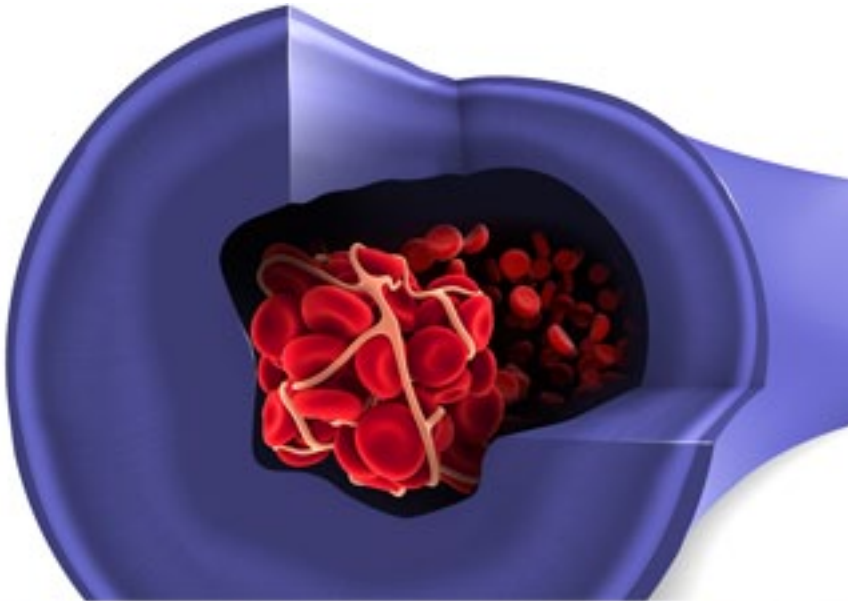


Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)



Overview

This condition is a blood clot that forms in a vein deep inside the body. This type of clot most commonly develops in the legs. This condition is dangerous, because the clot can break free and travel through the bloodstream to the lungs.

Causes and Risk Factors

Deep vein thrombosis can be caused by factors that restrict proper blood circulation. It can also be caused by factors that cause the blood to clot abnormally. The condition often develops during a period of immobilization. A clot can form during a long car ride or airplane flight, or when a patient is recovering in bed following a surgical procedure. Other risk factors include inherited blood clotting disorders, certain medications, and being overweight or obese. Being pregnant elevates a person's risk. Deep vein thrombosis is more common in people who have had heart failure or vein injuries, and in people who have been given a pacemaker or a catheter in a vein. It is more common in people who have cancer or who have had certain cancer treatments. People with a family history of deep vein thrombosis, smokers, and people who are over age 60 are also at an increased risk.

Symptoms

In many cases, a person with this condition does not notice any symptoms. When symptoms are present, they may include pain and swelling in the leg, ankle and foot. The leg may cramp. The skin may feel warm, and the skin's color may change.

Complication: Pulmonary Embolism

A serious complication of deep vein thrombosis is called pulmonary embolism. This occurs when the clot breaks free, travels through the bloodstream and lodges within one of the pulmonary arteries. These are the arteries that supply blood to the lungs. This can cause a person to have chest pain, shortness of breath, lightheadedness and a rapid pulse. The person may cough up blood. A pulmonary embolism is a medical emergency that can be fatal.

Treatment

Deep vein thrombosis can be treated with compression stockings and with medications that help thin the blood and break up the clot. For some patients, a filter may be inserted into the vena cava vein in the abdomen to prevent a clot from traveling up through the bloodstream to the lungs.

