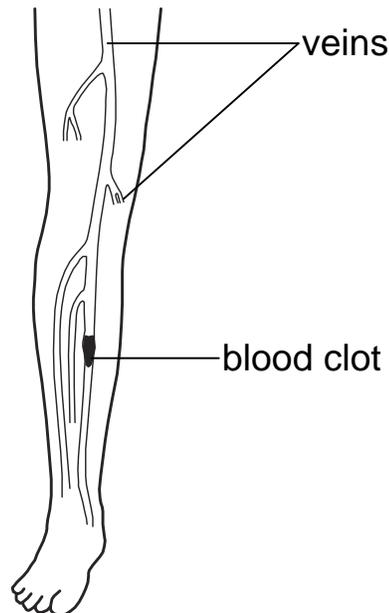


# Deep Vein Thrombosis, DVT

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## What is deep vein thrombosis?

Deep vein thrombosis is caused by a blood clot blocking a vein. This most often occurs in a leg vein. It is called DVT for short.



Deep vein thrombosis may be caused by:

- lack of activity and exercise for long periods of time
  - injury to the blood vessels
  - conditions that cause blood to clot such as certain cancers or inherited conditions
  - chemotherapy
  - estrogen medication including birth control pills or hormone replacement therapy
  - blood diseases – some people are born with factors in their blood that cause clots to form more often
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## Why are blood clots harmful?

A blood clot can be dangerous. A clot in a leg vein can slow down or stop the blood from going back to the heart. This causes symptoms such as pain, redness, tenderness and swelling around the site of the clot. Without treatment, the clot may get bigger and block other blood vessels.

When a clot breaks away from the vein it is called an embolus. It can travel through the blood vessels and become stuck or lodged in the lungs. This is called a pulmonary embolism. A pulmonary embolism is a serious problem. It can cause sharp chest pain, trouble breathing and shortness of breath.

## How is deep vein thrombosis treated?

This section covers treatment of deep vein thrombosis in the leg.

At the start, your leg may be swollen and painful. There are things you can do to help:

- Put your leg up. This helps control swelling and pain.
- If your leg is very swollen, avoid standing and walking for long periods of time.

Deep vein thrombosis is treated with medication called an anticoagulant or blood thinner. This medication prevents clots from forming or getting larger.

This medication works by disabling certain clotting factors that your body uses to make clots.

## What medications will I be taking?

You will be taking anticoagulant medication to thin your blood and prevent more clots from forming. This is often called a blood thinner. Members of your health care team will decide what medications you need to take. They will teach you how to take your medication and follow you closely.

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## Low Molecular Weight Heparin

This is an anticoagulant medication that is given by a needle just under the skin. This is called a subcutaneous injection. You will need to have this injection 1 or 2 times a day for about 5 days.

You can give yourself this medication at home after you learn how to do it. A friend or family member can also learn how to inject this medication.

## Warfarin

Warfarin is an anticoagulant medication in pill form that is taken by mouth. You may be asked to take warfarin at the same time you begin treatment with low molecular weight heparin. You take warfarin once a day.

When you take warfarin you will be followed closely by your health care provider. You will need to have regular blood tests so your health care provider can adjust your warfarin dose as needed. Follow your health care provider's instructions after each test. You and your health care provider will work together to get the correct effects of warfarin.

## Here are some helpful hints for taking warfarin

- Take this medication as directed by your health care provider.
  - Take this medication at the same time each day. Most patients will be advised to take warfarin at 6:00 pm each evening.
  - You may take this medication with or without food.
  - Use a 7-day pill organizer, called a dossette, for your pills. This helps you remember to take the pills.
  - Do not stop taking this medication without checking with your doctor first.
  - Carry a Medic-Alert card or identification to show that you take this medication and the medical reason why you take it.
  - Know what your warfarin dose is.
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## Why do I need regular blood tests?

The goal of taking warfarin is to slow blood clotting by a desired amount. The goal for each person is different.

INR is a blood test done to measure how long it takes for your blood to clot. When the INR result is available, your health care provider will call you to tell you if you keep on taking the same warfarin dose or change the dose.

When you first begin taking warfarin, you may need to get your blood tested 1 to 3 times a week.

You may also need to have your blood tested more often when you start, change or stop a medication.

It may take a while for your body to adjust to warfarin.

After your blood is balanced you will be able to have your blood tested less often.

## When you go for a blood test

**Please have your blood test done by 10:00 in the morning.**

Your health care provider should call you to tell you how much warfarin to take. Depending on the lab, the results may be available the same day or may arrive the next day. Please make sure you know when to expect your health care provider to call with the results.

If you do not get a call by 3:00 pm on the day of the blood test, contact your health care provider for instructions. **This is important to do.**

It is best to keep a diary of your INR results and the dose of warfarin you take. Some people use a calendar as a diary.

## Who should I tell that I take warfarin?

You need to tell all members of the health care team that you take warfarin. This includes doctors, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, chiropractors, massage therapists, physiotherapists, exercise leaders and podiatrists. Much attention to your care is needed to avoid bleeding problems.

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## What should I do if I miss a dose of warfarin?

Here are the general guidelines to follow:

- Talk to your health care provider about what to do when you first start taking warfarin.
- If you miss a dose by less than 12 hours, take it right away. Then go back to your regular dosing time. For example: if you miss a dose, you may take the missed dose the next morning. Then take your regular dose that day at 6:00 pm.

If you miss a dose more than 12 hours, contact your health care provider.

**Do not take 2 doses at one time to catch up.**

## Can I take other medications, vitamins or herbal products while taking warfarin?

Some medications, vitamins and herbal products can change the dose that you need.

Talk to your health care provider before you start, change or stop any:

- prescription medications
- over-the-counter medications
- vitamins
- herbal or natural products

You may need your blood tested sooner than planned.

## What can I take if I have a cold or headache?

You may take plain acetaminophen such as Tylenol® for aches, pain or fever. Avoid aspirin unless this has been approved by your health care provider.

You may take a nose spray such as xylometazoline or Otrivin® for a stuffy nose.

Talk to your pharmacist or health care provider before taking any other medications for a cold or headache.

## What else should I be aware of while taking anticoagulant medication?

### Activities

- Avoid any activity that may cause bruising or bleeding such as contact sports.
- Talk to your health care provider about activities that you may do.

### If you have a cut

- Apply pressure to the cut for full 5 minutes without letting go to stop the bleeding. **Do not peek!**
- After 5 minutes, if the bleeding continues, apply pressure to the cut for another 5 minutes. Repeat this process for a total of 60 minutes.

### If you have a nosebleed

- Lie down and apply pressure on the bleeding nostril without letting go for a full 10 minutes. **Do not peek!**
- Avoid touching the nostril or blowing your nose for the next 2 days.
- Keep your nostrils moist to avoid a nosebleed. You may need to gently apply a petroleum jelly such as Vaseline inside your nostrils to keep them moist.
- Use a humidifier indoors.
- If you have a nosebleed that you cannot stop, go to the nearest Emergency Department for help.

### Brushing your teeth

- Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush.
- Floss gently with satin or waxed dental floss daily.

### Menstrual bleeding changes

- Menstrual bleeding may be slightly heavier and last longer.
  - Talk to your health care provider if you are worried about any changes.
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## Can I get pregnant while taking warfarin?

- You should not get pregnant while taking this warfarin. This medication can harm a baby.
- Talk to your health care provider if you may be pregnant or are planning to get pregnant.

## Can I take warfarin if I am breastfeeding?

- Talk to your health care provider before starting to breastfeed.
- You may breastfeed while taking warfarin.

## Can I drink alcohol while taking warfarin?

It is best not to drink alcohol. If you choose to drink alcohol, do not drink more than 2 standard drinks a day. Alcohol affects your blood and blood tests.

### One standard drink means:

- 1.5 oz or 43 ml of liquor or spirits. This is 40% alcohol.
- 5 oz or 142 ml of wine. This is 12% alcohol.
- 12 oz or 341 ml of regular strength beer. This is 5% alcohol.
- Higher alcohol beers or coolers have more alcohol than one standard drink.

## Do I need to make changes to my diet while taking warfarin?

No, you do not need to change the food you eat. The most important thing to remember while taking warfarin is to keep your diet the same or consistent as much as you can.

Certain vegetables such as asparagus, broccoli, brussel sprouts, romaine lettuce and spinach contain vitamin K and can lower your INR. However, if you eat them on a consistent basis, your INR should not change. Eat at least one dark green vegetable every day as part of a healthy diet.

For more information about your diet while taking warfarin, ask your health care provider for a copy of the patient education handout, “Nutrition and Supplement Information – Warfarin“. You can also get a copy from our website <http://www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/>. Click on “Patient Education”.

**Talk to your health care provider before making any changes to your diet.**

## **Will deep vein thrombosis affect my lifestyle?**

Deep vein thrombosis and anticoagulation therapy should not prevent you from leading a normal healthy lifestyle. After the pain and swelling in your legs is less, you can continue to enjoy physical activities such as walking, swimming and jogging. Exercise helps as it promotes good blood circulation.

Avoid contact sports where injuries are more likely to occur. You can talk about this with your health care provider to decide what is safe for you to do.

You can travel as long as you are able to take your warfarin and have your blood tested while you are away. Before making any major changes in your lifestyle such as your diet, travelling or starting an exercise program, talk to your health care provider.

## **Contact your health care provider or go to the Emergency Department if you have:**

- increased swelling or pain in your leg
- sharp chest pain or trouble breathing
- any signs of bleeding