

Preventing Blood Clots After Orthopedic and Spine Surgery

What is a blood clot?

A blood clot (venous thromboembolism, VTE) occurs when blood thickens and clumps together in a vein.

There are several types of blood clots:

- A deep vein thrombosis (DVT) forms in a deep vein, usually in the leg.
- A pulmonary embolism (PE) happens when part of a DVT breaks off and travels to the lungs, which can be dangerous and may cause life-threatening breathing problems.

Why does surgery increase risk?

Both joint replacement and spine procedures involve reduced mobility and changes in circulation that increase the risk of developing a deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

Hospital Measures and Your Role in Preventing Blood Clots

- During your hospital stay, compression pumps or stockings will be placed on your calves to help with circulation and blood flow. These devices gently squeeze your legs to keep blood moving.
- Keep your blood flowing by doing ankle pumps and ankle circles – aim for 10–20 repetitions every hour while awake – and by getting up to walk with hospital staff as often as you're able.
- Avoid long periods of sitting or lying down, as regular movement is one of the most effective ways to prevent blood clots after surgery.
- For the first several weeks after surgery, try to stand and take short walks regularly – ideally every 1–2 hours while awake. Be sure to follow any activity restrictions your provider has given you.

- Keep up with regular fluid intake – good hydration supports circulation and is an easy, effective way to help prevent blood clots.
- You may also receive medication to help minimize clot formation. **Follow your medication plan exactly as prescribed.**

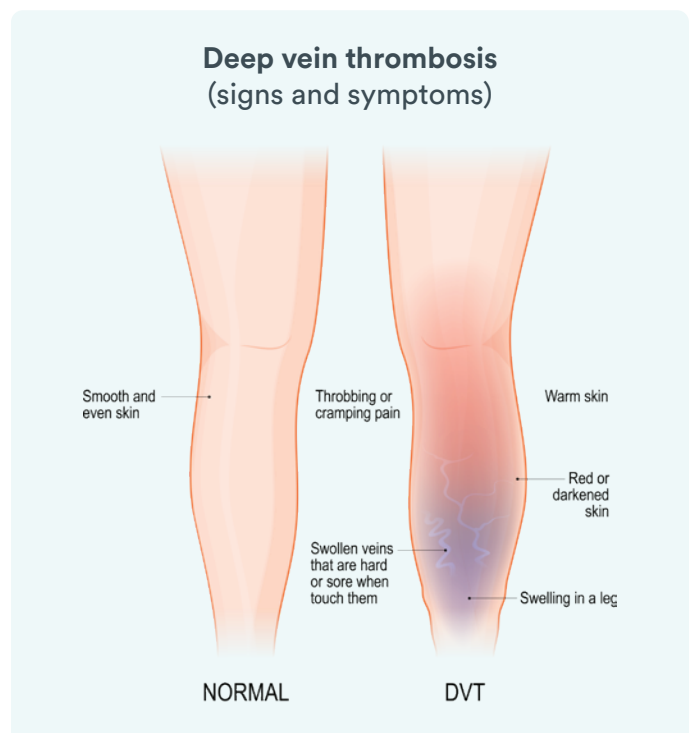
Warning Signs of a Possible Blood Clot

Be sure to let your healthcare provider know right away if you experience:

- Leg swelling that does not improve with elevation
- Pain or tenderness in the calf or thigh
- Warmth or redness in the leg

Call 911 if you experience:

- Sudden difficulty breathing
- Chest pain
- Heart palpitations or a fast heartbeat



continued

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Treatment if a Blood Clot Occurs

Blood clots are typically treated with blood-thinning medication for several months to prevent the clot from growing and to reduce the risk of new clots forming.

Travel After Surgery: How to Minimize Blood Clot Risk

- Avoid long trips – especially flights – for the first 4–6 weeks after surgery, when your risk of blood clots is highest.
- Talk with your surgeon before making any travel plans so you can review your personal risks.
- If you must travel, move and stretch your legs often, drink plenty of water, and continue any prescribed blood-thinning medication as directed.