

Self-Care for Superficial Venous Thrombosis (SVT)

Patients with vein disease are at increased risk for developing blood clots in unhealthy veins, which is known as superficial venous thrombosis or SVT. This results from sluggish blood flow or “pooling” in unhealthy veins. Once a clot develops, the body responds in the form of inflammation, which can lead to pain, swelling and redness. These clots can occur in a varicose vein that you see on the surface or in an unhealthy vein under the surface of your skin. You may notice a firm, tender lump or cord under the skin. Sometimes the skin over the lump becomes red and warm. The vast majority of these clots are not dangerous, but occasionally they can extend into deep veins which can be serious and even life-threatening. Seek urgent medical care for the following signs concerning for a deep blood clot:

- Pain in your calf.
- Generalized (overall) swelling in the leg, calf, ankle and/or foot. Particularly when the swelling is more noticeable in one leg when compared to the other.

Superficial venous thromboses are sometimes treated with a blood thinning medication (anticoagulant) to minimize the risk that they may enlarge causing worsening symptoms or extend into a deep vein (DVT). Whether or not a blood thinner is recommended for you depends on the circumstances under which the clot developed, your symptoms, the size and the location of the blood clot.

The following are home measures to care for yourself:

1. Your provider may prescribe graduated compression garment(s) to be worn during waking hours. As a general rule, these should be professionally fitted to ensure the proper strength, fit and style (eg knee-high vs thigh-high). Continue to wear your compression stockings during the day as long as you are having pain or tenderness to touch.
2. When you are not active, elevate your leg(s) above heart level as much as possible. A pillow under your leg(s) can be used to increase elevation if needed.
3. Walk frequently throughout the day. Avoid sitting without elevating your leg(s) or standing for long periods as much as possible. While sitting or standing, pump your foot up and down by alternating standing on your heel and standing on your toes. Walking and foot pumps activate the calf muscle to move blood in your veins.
4. You may want to begin taking an over-the-counter pain medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) or an NSAID (Ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Naproxen). For superficial venous thrombosis NSAIDs tend to be more effective at reducing the inflammation that causes pain. However, you should avoid NSAIDs if you are taking a blood thinner. Always check with your primary care provider before taking any new medication. Consult the medication packaging instructions regarding maximum dosing or ask your pharmacist. Using this medication daily for 1-2 weeks can help reduce inflammation and speed your recovery even if it does not take the pain away entirely. Expect the pain to improve gradually over several weeks.
5. Warm compresses may lessen the symptoms related to SVT. Use water that is hot, but not scalding. Soak a towel in hot water and wring out the excess. Fold the towel into a square and apply to the painful area for up to 20 minutes at a time. If it feels too hot at any time, remove the towel immediately.
6. The following are general guidelines for patients taking a blood thinner:
 - a. Avoid hazardous or risky activities that could lead to injury such as contact sports or high-speed sports/activities. A few examples include biking, skiing, four-wheeling or snowmobiling. Blood thinners can cause serious and even life-threatening bleeding. If you are unsure if an activity is safe, ask your provider or avoid that activity.
 - b. Notify your medical or dental providers that you are taking a blood thinner before undergoing any procedure or surgery.
 - c. Avoid Aspirin and NSAIDs (eg Ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Naproxen) while taking an anticoagulant unless directed otherwise by your provider. Adding these medications can increase your risk of bleeding. Acetaminophen (Tylenol) can be used as an alternative in most cases. Check with your primary care provider if you are unsure if Acetaminophen is safe for you.

Your provider has checked you carefully, however, occasionally new problems can arise. Seek medical attention right away if you develop any new symptoms. Follow-up care is a very important part of your treatment. Be sure to make and keep all appointments recommended by your provider.

When should I call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example:

- You are dizzy, lightheaded or feel like you may faint.
- You faint/pass out (lose consciousness).
- You have difficulty breathing or feel like you cannot catch your breath.
- You have sudden chest pain, shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You have problems with your vision or balance.

Call the clinic or seek immediate medical care for:

- Worsening pain in your leg.
- Worsening swelling in your leg.
- Color change of the skin of your leg or an expanding area of color change.

