

VTE in pregnancy (a blood clot in the vein)

This information sheet aims to answer some commonly asked questions about VTE in pregnancy and after birth

IMPORTANT: This is general information only.
Ask your doctor or midwife about what care is right for you.

What is a VTE?

VTE stands for 'venous thromboembolism'. A VTE is a blood clot that forms in the veins that carry blood back to your heart.

Most clots start in the vein of the leg, arm or groin and these are called deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

Sometimes a clot in the vein can move to the lungs and this is called a pulmonary embolism (PE). The term 'VTE' is used to mean a clot in the vein that occurs anywhere in the body and is used to describe both DVT and PE.

Is a VTE serious?

VTE is a serious medical condition. If you think you might have a VTE, you should contact your health care provider straight away. If you have a VTE, you will usually need urgent care in hospital. Although very rare, pregnant women and women who have given birth, have died from a VTE.

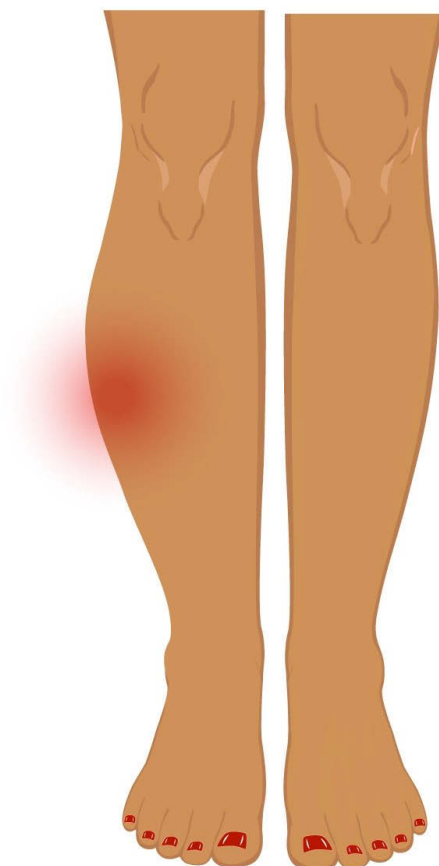
How do you know if you have a VTE?

A VTE in your leg or arm causes:

- pain or tenderness in that arm or leg
- swelling
- redness or skin discolouration
- your arm or leg to feel warm when you touch it

A VTE in your lungs can cause:

- sudden shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- pain or discomfort in your chest
- a very fast or irregular heart beat
- you to cough up blood



Who is more likely to have a VTE?

Being pregnant and having a baby increases your chance of having a VTE by 4 to 5 times compared to women who are not pregnant. This means 1 or 2 women out of every 1000 women having a baby will have a VTE. It can happen any time in your pregnancy, but the highest risk is in the first 6 weeks after you give birth.

Your chance of having a VTE is higher if:

Before pregnancy you:

- have had a VTE before
- have a mother, father, brother or sister who has had a VTE
- have a medical condition (e.g. thrombophilia, heart disease, lung disease or arthritis)
- are over 35 years of age
- have already had three or more babies
- are overweight (BMI over 30)
- smoke cigarettes
- have bad varicose veins

During pregnancy and/or after birth you:

- have a caesarean section birth
- have a long or difficult labour and birth
- can't move around as much (e.g. during long distance travel or if you are unwell in hospital)
- develop high blood pressure
- are having more than one baby (e.g. twins)
- lose a lot of blood or need a blood transfusion
- have your baby early (preterm)

Can a VTE be prevented?

Your health care provider will assess your risk early in pregnancy and again when your baby is born. You will also be assessed if you become sick or are admitted to hospital.

To help prevent a VTE:

- maintain a healthy weight and lifestyle
- quit smoking
- stay active
- if you sit for long periods, move around or exercise your legs every 1–2 hours
- If you are planning travel of 4 hours or more, talk to your doctor before you go
- drink enough fluids to avoid dehydration (about 2 litres per day while pregnant and more if breastfeeding)

Your healthcare provider might advise you to:

- wear special firm-fitting stockings
- have regular injections of a blood thinning medication (e.g. clexane)
- while in bed in hospital, wear special sleeves or cuffs around your legs. These automatically inflate and deflate with air. This improves blood flow in your legs and helps prevent a VTE
- avoid deep tissue massage of your legs or arms

Support & Information

13HEALTH (13 432584) is a phone line that provides health information, referral and services to the public.

www.qld.gov.au/health/contacts/advice/13health

Children by Choice 1800 117 725 (free call) offers free all-options pregnancy counselling, information and referrals Queensland-wide. www.childrenbychoice.org.au

Child Health Service Provides newborn drop-in services, early feeding and support, child health clinics. Refer to www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/community-health/child-health-service for your nearest service

Pregnancy, Birth & Baby Helpline 1800 882 436 (free call) offers free, confidential, professional information and counselling for women, their partners and families relating to issues of conception, pregnancy, birthing and postnatal care www.health.gov.au/pregnancyhelpline

Women's Health Queensland Wide 1800 017 676 (free call) offers health promotion, information and education service for women and health professionals throughout Queensland. www.womhealth.org.au

True Relationships and Reproductive Health provides expert reproductive and sexual health care. www.true.org.au

Australian Breastfeeding Association 1800 686268 (breastfeeding helpline). Community based self-help group offers information, counselling, and support services, on breastfeeding issues www.breastfeeding.asn.au

Lifeline 13 11 14 Lifeline offers a telephone crisis support service to anyone www.lifeline.org.au