

Thrombophlebitis

Like **deep vein thrombosis** (DVT), **thrombophlebitis** is a vein inflammation (phlebitis) caused by a blood clot or *thrombus*. Thrombophlebitis, however, affects *superficial* veins, as illustrated below, and is not generally considered a serious medical condition.

Symptoms associated with thrombophlebitis may include pain, redness, irritation, swelling of the affected area and occasionally edema in the extremities.

Risk factors include blood clotting disorders, existing deep vein thrombosis, and prolonged sitting. Thrombophlebitis may also be a manifestation of malignancy, known as the *Trousseau sign of malignancy*.

A diagnosis is made primarily based upon the appearance of the affected area. Diagnostic testing including doppler ultrasound, arteriography, and blood coagulation studies may be performed when the cause is not readily identifiable or symptoms persist or worsen following treatment.

Treatment includes monitoring blood pressure and pulse, checking circulation, elevating the affected area, moist heat, and in some cases support stockings. Additionally, patients should be advised to avoid pressure or massage on the affected area to reduce the risk of further damage. Anti-inflammatory medications, thrombolytics, anticoagulants, analgesics and NSAIDS are often recommended. Antibiotics may be used if infection is present. In severe cases, surgical removal or bypass may be recommended.

Most cases of thrombophlebitis resolve quickly with treatment. Complications are rare, but serious. The most serious complication is pulmonary embolism, which occurs when a blood clot dislodges, travels through the heart and into the lungs, blocking the dense network of pulmonary capillaries. This can be a life threatening condition and patients should be advised of warning signs and when to seek emergency care.

