

## By the numbers

CVT is a less common type of stroke, accounting for **<1% of all stroke syndromes**.

CVT more commonly affects women, the majority **under age 50**.

**About 85%** of people are functionally independent after CVT, but some may experience longer-term issues with cognition, pain, fatigue, or mood, which may leave them unable to return to work or school.

## Tips for Recovery from Peers to Peers

- Ask about and seek resources in your area that are available to support you in your recovery.
- Practice self-compassion.
- Be actively involved in your rehabilitation and recovery.
- Celebrate your accomplishments!
- Advocate for yourself or your loved one.

**Your Stroke Journey** can help you and your family understand stroke and the recovery process.

The **Post-Stroke Checklist** can help you plan your discussions with your healthcare team. Heart & Stroke's **Virtual Care Checklist** helps you prepare for your virtual follow up appointments. Visit [heartandstroke.ca](http://heartandstroke.ca) for more information.

# Cerebral Venous Thrombosis

## Understanding CVT and taking charge of your recovery

### What is Cerebral Venous Thrombosis (CVT)?

CVT occurs when a blood clot blocks a vein draining blood from the brain. Symptomatic CVT, where the diagnosis is associated with neurological symptoms, is a medical emergency.

### Diagnosis of CVT

Diagnosing CVT is difficult because symptoms differ from the most typical **signs of stroke (FAST – Face, Arms, Speech Time)**. The initial clinical assessment of confirmed or suspected CVT includes urgent and appropriate neuroimaging and clinical evaluation.

### Common signs and symptoms of CVT\*

- Severe headache, often with nausea and/or vomiting
  - Seizure
  - Focal neurologic deficits: weakness, sensory issues, speech problems or difficulty with thinking
  - Depressed level of consciousness/confusion
  - Visual changes including blurred vision or double vision
- ✓ **Action:** Learn the signs and symptoms of CVT. If you see any signs of stroke in yourself or another person, call 9-1-1 right away (or your local emergency number). Do not drive yourself or the person with stroke to the hospital. An ambulance will get you to the best hospital for stroke care.

### Risk Factors of CVT

Individuals who experience CVT tend to be younger than other individuals who experience a stroke. A proportion of individuals will have CVT because of a separate known or unknown issue (e.g., rare complication of birth control pills, during pregnancy or the first few weeks after, certain cancers, other blood clotting issue, head injury).

- ✓ **Action:** Ask your doctor about identifying and managing your risk factors for CVT.

### Acute Treatment for CVT

Some individuals with CVT will be admitted to hospital and managed on a specialized acute stroke unit. The healthcare team will determine the best immediate treatment and long-term management for you. You may be treated with anticoagulation medication (“blood thinners”) and may require surgery. The healthcare team will also help manage other symptoms such as headaches, vision changes, or seizures.

- ✓ **Action:** Discuss your treatment options with your CVT healthcare team. Ask which referrals you require and make sure they are made. Ask questions about your treatment plan. Request information in writing if needed.

\*This list summarizes the most common presenting symptoms of symptomatic CVT but is not an exhaustive list of all potential presenting symptoms.

# Post-Acute CVT Management and Recovery

## Be informed | Be involved | Take action

Post-CVT care needs are unique, individualized and will vary depending on the severity, the cause and the impact of the CVT. Other important factors may include individual work, school and home situations. Recognition and management of physical and cognitive challenges such as headaches, vision changes, seizure disorders, changes in cognition and mood, fatigue, and changes in physical function will help to promote recovery and facilitate wellness after CVT.

**Note:** this list represents just some of the key components to be aware of. Talk to your healthcare team to learn more.

### Headaches or Vision Changes

Headaches or vision changes are common with CVT.

- ✓ **Action:** Seek urgent medical attention if you experience changes in your headache pattern – particularly if, after a period of improvement, there is worsening or unrelenting headache. Similarly, seek urgent medical attention if visual blurring or double vision is new, or worsening. Talk to your healthcare team about your management options, and ensure you have referrals to the appropriate experts.

### Seizures

Seizures can happen early or later on with CVT.

- ✓ **Action:** Be aware that seizures can happen and need to be addressed by your healthcare team in a timely way, especially if you are having new seizures or continue to have seizures after starting on antiseizure medication. Taking prescribed medication, good quality sleep, stress management and minimizing alcohol intake are important for seizure prevention. Speak to your healthcare provider about restrictions in driving and other activities and be aware of important safety concerns and take appropriate measures (e.g., medical bracelet).

### Mood and Mental Health

The emotions you have can be intense, change quickly and can sometimes be difficult to control. Intense feelings are a normal reaction to a big health event, but they can also be a result of brain injury from a stroke, and you are at higher risk for depression and anxiety. These mood changes can impact your recovery. There are treatments that can help.

- ✓ **Action:** Be aware of changes in your mood. Talk about how you are feeling to members of your healthcare team and those in your life that are close to you. Ask to be connected to a mental health professional. Consider joining peer support groups/programs.

### Cognition

Trouble with cognitive skills can occur following CVT. This can range from mild forgetfulness to more serious challenges with awareness, thinking, attention, memory, language, judgment or problem solving.

- ✓ **Action:** Talk to your healthcare team and your family and friends about your cognition and difficulties you may be having. There are treatment and management options that can help, such as cognitive rehabilitation. Ask for an assessment by a qualified healthcare professional.

### Fatigue

Low energy both in body and mind and a need for more sleep or rest can be an after-effect of CVT. When fatigue becomes long-lasting, overwhelming and does not get better with rest, it is a medical condition called post-stroke fatigue.

- ✓ **Action:** Talk to your healthcare team about how to structure your day, arrange your space, establish healthy eating and sleeping habits, and how to take part in safe exercise and leisure activity you can tolerate. Ask for help; your family and friends can help you get things done.

### Anticoagulation Medication and Heavy Menstrual Bleeding

Heavy menstrual bleeding can happen in individuals who menstruate taking anticoagulation medication.

- ✓ **Action:** Talk to your healthcare team about the best way to manage this.

### Future Family Planning

Individuals with a history of CVT who wish to become pregnant should receive counselling and medical follow-up about future family planning.

- ✓ **Action:** If you are thinking about pregnancy, it is important to have a medical plan in place with your healthcare team.

