

## How can you tell if a person has DVT?

Diagnosis of DVT can be difficult, as sometimes there may be no symptoms of the condition during or immediately after travelling.

However if you have any of the following symptoms even up to a month after travel you should immediately consult your doctor:

- Persistent calf swelling, especially if only involving one leg

**Note:** Some minor leg swelling is common in many people during prolonged travel but should return to normal with movement following travel

- Persistent pain or tenderness in the leg, especially the calf, during or after travelling
- Increased skin temperature or redness in the leg
- Sharp chest pain that is worsened by breathing
- Unexpected shortness of breath
- Coughing up of blood

### For further information contact:

Your doctor or primary healthcare professional

or

Health Direct-Telephone

**1800 022 222**

(24 hour health advice)

# DVT

## DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS



## GUIDELINES FOR SAFE TRAVEL



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HP 9930

## What is Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

DVT is a blood circulation problem caused by blood clots that block the deep veins in the legs. Deep veins are blood vessels that carry blood back to the heart and lungs. Occasionally some of the clot can move or break up causing further problems by blocking important blood vessels in other parts of the body. This process is called embolism. Embolism can affect the function of the lungs and heart causing chest pain and breathing difficulty that can on rare occasions, result in death.

## What has DVT to do with travel?

Prolonged sitting, often with restricted leg-room, is a common feature of long distance travel. This lack of movement and pressure on the back of the legs over an extended period could restrict the blood flow in the deep veins of the legs. The sluggish blood flow contributes to excess clotting. Although there is currently a lack of solid evidence for the role of air travel and DVT, some doctors consider that long haul flights may be a risk factor for DVT. Other forms of long distance travel, for example road and train, may also be of concern.

## Who is at risk?

While all people are at risk of travel related DVT, for the fit, healthy individual the risk is very low. However there are a number of personal factors that may increase the risk of travel related DVT. Often people who suffer from DVT have three or more co-existing personal risk factors.

## Personal Risk Factors

- Previous personal history of deep vein thrombosis, blood clots or pulmonary embolism
- Family history of DVT
- Recent surgery or injury, particularly involving the legs
- Specific blood factors that increase the blood's tendency to clot
- Pregnancy
- Taking the oral contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy
- Active cancer
- Obesity
- Chronic disease, especially heart or lung disease and diabetes
- Older age

If you have multiple risk factors or are uncertain of your personal risk, seek advice from your doctor before travelling, particularly on long flights.

## How can I reduce my risk of possible travel associated DVT?

Some common-sense suggestions:

### During Travel

- Periodically stretch out and move your legs and ankles and massage your calves while seated
- **Note:** Avoid excessive movement around the aircraft cabin, as the risk of injury from unexpected turbulence may outweigh the benefits of exercise
- Drink plenty of water or other non-alcoholic fluids during your flight
- Restrict excessive alcohol and coffee consumption during travel as it may cause dehydration
- Avoid taking strong sleeping tablets or sedatives which may result in sitting without moving for long periods
- Wear loose, non restrictive, comfortable clothing during air travel

### Before Travel

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Participate in regular physical activity

