

Travellers' thrombosis

All travellers should take precautions to avoid getting a deep-vein thrombosis (DVT), not just those flying. (A deep-vein thrombosis is a blood clot which forms in a deep vein, usually in a leg.)

Even if you aren't flying but plan to spend hours on a train, bus, or car, the following advice will help reduce your chances of getting a DVT.

- Exercise your calf muscles regularly, contracting them by moving the foot up and down, every so often and, where possible, by getting up and moving around.
- Do not drink too much alcohol, as it will dehydrate you.
- If you are wearing special medical stockings, you must make sure they are a good fit. If they don't fit properly, they can cause more harm than good.
- Do not take sleeping tablets as they can result in you sleeping in an awkward position.
- Drink plenty of water and stay well-hydrated.

Although there has been a lot of media attention around DVT, the risk to anyone who is in good health of developing a DVT is probably less than one in every 10,000 long-haul journeys, so you do not need to be too worried.

Medical Director Professor Beverley Hunt advises: "Although there is an increased risk to people with the condition 'sticky blood' and women on the combined oral contraceptive pill this can be helped by taking the advice above.

"Taller and smaller people are also slightly more at risk than others; tall people for all types of long-distance travel and smaller people mainly during air travel as they may not be able to rest their feet comfortably on the floor, causing the legs to dangle and adding extra pressure to the back of the knees."

However low the risk, you should take some simple precautions as a deep-vein thrombosis can be dangerous. A blood clot in the leg can break up and travel through your body. It can then eventually block blood from circulating to your lungs.

In the unlikely event that in the weeks after a long-haul flight or journey you do develop symptoms like pain and swelling in either of your legs or unexpected shortness of breath or chest pain, you should get medical advice immediately.

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