

# Patient information from BMJ

Last published: Dec 20, 2017

## DVT and long-distance travel

**If you have deep vein thrombosis (DVT), it means a blood clot has formed in one of your deep veins, most likely in your leg. Parts of the clot can break off and travel to your lungs, which can be dangerous.**

DVT is more likely if you can't or don't move about for long periods. This may be why some research has found that people have a higher chance of DVT if they go on a long-distance journey, such as a long flight.

If you've had DVT before, or if you are at higher risk of getting it, you should discuss with your doctor ways to prevent it before you embark on a long-distance trip. Things that may increase your risk of DVT include being older, being very overweight (obese), having had a recent surgery or injury, having a blood clotting disorder, being pregnant, taking hormone therapy, and having cancer.

You might need to take drugs to reduce your risk of blood clots. Or you might need to wear special elastic stockings called compression stockings. These stockings help to keep the blood flowing smoothly through the veins in your legs, so it's less likely to form a clot. Your pharmacist can measure you to ensure you buy the right size of stockings.

Whether or not you are at high risk, you can do exercises and other things while you travel that may help prevent DVT. However, we can't say for sure whether these things work, as there hasn't been much good research on them.

Here are some of the things experts recommend when travelling.

- Don't take sleeping tablets. These tablets can make you fall deeply asleep so that you don't move your legs at all.
- Don't drink alcohol, but do drink extra water and other fluids.
- Try to exercise your legs while seated. Bend and straighten your legs, feet, and toes while sitting down, every half hour. Make a circle pattern with each foot in turn.
- Press the balls of your feet down hard against the floor or a footrest to increase the blood flow in your legs.
- Avoid sitting still for long periods. Take short walks around the cabin of your aeroplane or train compartment every 30 to 60 minutes. If you are in a car or bus, take a short

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walk whenever you stop for a break. If you are driving, make sure you schedule regular breaks.

Even if you are not at high risk, you might want to think about wearing compression stockings. Some, but not all, research has shown that these stockings reduce the risk of getting DVT on long-haul flights. But the stockings are not suitable for everyone, so ask your doctor about them first.

You should get medical help quickly if you get symptoms of DVT. The main symptoms are swelling or pain in the calf or thigh of one leg, or both swelling and pain. If a clot has travelled to your lungs, you may get chest pain or shortness of breath.

If you get DVT because of sitting still on a long-distance journey, you might not notice any pain or swelling right after the trip. It can take hours or even days or weeks for you to get any symptoms.

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