

Patient information

DVT (deep vein thrombosis) and travelling

DVT risk and travelling

Travel-related DVT can occur as a result of prolonged immobility during long distance travel (for example, by bus, car, air or train).

- Prolonged cramped sitting during long distance travel interferes with the venous blood flow in the legs and causes venous stasis (inactivity).
- Seat-edge pressure on the area behind the knees may contribute to vein wall damage as well as the venous stasis.
- Altitude alters how the blood flows around the body.
- The risk of DVT increases with the duration of travel and with multiple flights within a short period of time.

The risk for healthy people is approximately 1 in 107,000 for flights lasting less than four hours and 1 in 4,600 for flights lasting more than four hours. That figure increases to 1 in 1,200 for flights lasting more than 16 hours.

Travel-related DVT risk increases when there are other health conditions involved:

- Active cancer
- Family history of DVT or pulmonary embolism (PE) in a close family member
- Aged over 60
- People with extremes of height, either over 1.90 metres (6ft 2ins) tall or shorter than 1.60 metres (5ft 3ins)
- Inherited blood clotting disorders
- Large varicose veins or chronic venous problems

- Limited mobility
- Obesity
- Pregnancy and up to 6 weeks following delivery
- Previous DVT / PE
- Recent surgery or trauma, particularly abdominal, pelvic region or legs
- Recent heart attack
- Combined oral contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy (HRT)

This does not mean that you are not able to take flights or travel, it just means that you will need to take precautions and reduce the risks as much as you can.

Actions that you can take to minimise the risk of developing a DVT when travelling

Flights

- When taking flights, walk around for approximately 30 minutes before boarding the aircraft
- Avoid alcohol prior and during the flight, but remain well hydrated with water
- Keep moving during the flight as much as possible, avoid sitting with your knees at a 90-degree angle to ensure good blood return from the lower legs
- Try to sit with legs stretched out as much as possible
- Shrug your shoulders, rotate your ankles and stand up and stretch at least every 2 hours
- Avoid taking sleeping tablets, especially on long haul flights: take naps rather than prolonged periods of sleep
- Wear flight socks or properly measured compression stockings especially if you suffer with varicose vein or chronic venous problems

Car or coach journeys

- Plan your route for long journeys so that you can take regular stops, approximately every 2 hours, to get out and stretch your legs eg at service stations or areas where you could stop
- Most chartered coach journeys for holidays do take regular comfort breaks- make sure you disembark from the coach and have a walk around

- Remain well hydrated with water
- Avoid sitting with knees at a 90-degree angle to ensure good blood return from the lower legs
- Try to sit with your legs stretched out if seating allows

Train journeys

- As for travelling by air or road, the same principles apply: stay well hydrated, get up and move around and stretch your legs where possible
- Avoid alcohol
- Wear loose fitting comfortable clothing
- Avoid sleeper trains where possible

Previous DVT and travelling

If you have been diagnosed with a DVT in the DVT clinic today and have a long journey planned, you will be able to travel by air after you have completed your loading dose of anticoagulation however it is strongly advised to postpone any air travel any sooner than three to four weeks after your diagnosis.

If you have had a previous DVT and are no longer taking any form of anticoagulation, please consult and discuss with your GP, if you have any concerns about developing a further DVT whilst travelling long distances. They may offer a temporary period of anticoagulation to cover you while you are travelling

Further information can be found on www.nice.org.uk and looking up DVT prevention for travellers or www.stoptheclot.org where you can access the “Passport to Safety” information.

Please feel free to call the DVT clinic for further information regarding DVT and travel: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 4.00pm.

Please try and call after 2.00pm for any enquiries where possible.

If you would like any information regarding access to the West Suffolk Hospital and its facilities please visit the website for AccessAble (formerly DisabledGo)

<https://www.accessable.co.uk>

