

Patient information

DVT and Travelling

Anticoagulation and DVT Service 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 flow in the legs and causes venous stasis.
- Seat- edge pressure on the area behind the knee 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 annual incidence of DVT is estimated to be 1 in 1000. The risk increase two to four fold after long-haul flight (> 4 hours). Travel by other forms of transport carry a similar risk.

The risk of travel related DVT increases with the duration of travel and where there are multiple flights in a short period. For people who are low risk this is estimated to be 1 event in every 4656 to 6000 flights over 4 hours in length.

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
- Chronic venous insufficiency.
- People with extremes of height – either over 1.90 metres tall or shorter than 1.60 metres
- 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
- Limited mobility and/or recent surgery or trauma, particularly abdominal, pelvic region or legs

- Combined oral contraceptive pill or hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- Obesity
- Older age (risk increases from the age of 40).
- Pregnancy, or up to 6 weeks postpartum.

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.
- Choose an aisle seat when feasible.
- 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 standing up and stretch at least 2 hourly.
- Avoid alcohol prior and during the flight, but remain well hydrated with water
- 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, coach or train journeys

- 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.
- Avoid alcohol .
- Wear loose fitting comfortable clothing.
- **For car or coach journeys:** Plan your route for long journeys so that you can take regular stops approximately every 2 hours at service stations or areas where you could stop, get out and stretch your legs. Most chartered coach journeys for holidays do take regular comfort breaks- make sure you disembark from the coach and have a walk around.
- **For train journeys:** As per road travel, same principles apply – stay well hydrated, get up and move around and stretch your legs where possible.

Previous DVT and travelling

If you have a new diagnosis of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism, it is usually advisable to delay air travel for 2 weeks. If travel is unavoidable, seek specialist advice.

Once you have been taking anticoagulation for 2 weeks and are stable then you can proceed with air travel.

If you have had a previous DVT and are no longer taking any form of anticoagulation 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 travelers 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. 01284 713092 Mon – Fri 8.00- 16.00hrs (Please try and call after 14.00hrs for any enquiries where possible).

Clinical research

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

Accessibility

If you require this leaflet in a different format, please contact the patient advice and liaison service on 01284 712555 or email PALS@wsh.nhs.uk

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