
Outpatient Anticoagulant Service

Travelling and Thrombosis Risk

There are no published evidence-based guidelines, and this leaflet is intended only as **a source of information.**

The risk of blood clots triggered by travel and thrombosis has been called several different names over the last few years. It is now appropriately described as **Traveller's Thrombosis** instead of the widely used 'economy class syndrome'. This is because thrombosis due to prolonged immobility occurs in association with long distance journeys by car, coach, bus, train and ferry as well as air travel. The longer the length of your travel the greater the risk you have of developing a blood clot.

There are precautions you may consider taking to minimise your risk of both deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and pulmonary embolism (PE). People can be divided into different risk groups dependent on their current health and medical history.

Measures for all travellers in how to reduce the risk of developing a DVT or PE (low risk group)

- Do not sit for long periods, particularly with pressure on the back of your thighs.
Avoid crossing your legs when sitting and make frequent changes of position, for example by taking a walk.
- Avoid sleeping tablets as they may also contribute to longer periods of immobilisation.
- Regularly bend your ankles to contract your calf muscles.
- Maintain hydration by drinking plenty of water and soft drinks and by minimising alcohol and caffeine intakes. Remember that air conditioning, excess heat, diarrhoea and vomiting and inadequate fluid intake can all cause dehydration.
- When travelling wear comfortable clothes and shoes. Some people take off their shoes during the journey.

Moderate risk group

This group may include you if:

- you have had a DVT / PE in the past.
- you have had surgery under a general anaesthetic lasting more than 30 minutes in the previous two months, but **not** within the last four weeks.
- you are obese.
- you have varicose veins.
- you are pregnant or in the post partum period.
- you have lower limb paralysis or have had lower limb trauma within the previous six weeks.

If you belong in this group, **please consider**:

- Following the measures suggested above for low risk travellers.
- Wearing compression hosiery (also called travel socks).

High-risk group

This group may include you if:

- you have had surgery under a general anaesthetic lasting more than 30 minutes in the last four weeks.
- you have a malignancy (active cancer)
- you have a plaster cast on a lower limb. If you have a plaster cast please discuss with your doctor whether the cast should be split prior to a flight.

If you belong in this group, **please consider**:

- Following the low to medium risk measures suggested above.
- Ask your doctor to consider prescribing for self-administration a low molecular weight heparin (LMWH) injection one to two hours before travelling.
- The recommended prophylactic dose of LMWH for people weighing over 50kg is 5000 units s.c.

What are the symptoms of a DVT or PE?

- Pain and/or swelling in the legs
- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath

Please note that a DVT can occur some days or even weeks after a trip.

Special considerations

If you have had a thrombosis in the past and now think you could have other risk factors that could increase your risk of another thrombosis, you should discuss with your doctor if low molecular weight heparin is appropriate.

People with a plaster cast on a lower limb. Please discuss with your doctor whether the cast should be split prior to flying.

Any person who has had a DVT /PE diagnosed and is taking oral anticoagulant therapy should seek medical advice if considering long haul travel within 2 weeks of diagnosis.

Remember

- The risk of developing travel related DVT or PE is small.
- You can benefit from the suggestions given above on how to minimise your risk.
- If you develop pain or swelling in your legs, chest pain and/or shortness of breath after a long journey, you should seek medical advice.
- Aspirin has not been proven to be effective in reducing the risk of Traveller's Thrombosis.



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Polish

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Cantonese

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Bengali

Document history

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