

Preventing Blood Clots During Extended Travel

Research from the World Health Organization shows that about 1 in 6,000 travelers will develop a blood clot due to inactivity during travel of more than four hours. These blood clots are due to a stagnation of blood in the veins caused by prolonged immobility, which can promote blood clot formation in veins.

During travel of long duration, the risk of immobility, circulatory problems and Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) may be reduced by moving around to help to reduce any period of prolonged immobility. At a minimum you should stand and walk once every 2–3 hours. In addition, a simple technique to promote circulation is to flex your toes back and then point them forward. Exercise of the calf muscles can stimulate circulation, reduce discomfort, fatigue, stiffness, and it may reduce the risk of developing Deep Vein Thrombosis.

Avoid placing luggage and other items in a location where it restricts movement of your legs and feet. In addition, wear clothing that is loose and comfortable. You should also avoid sedatives or drinking large amounts of alcohol because they may make you more likely to be immobile for longer periods of time.

If you have one or more of the following risk factors you should seek specific medical advice from your doctor before embarking on a trip of three or more hours:

- Previous VTE or pulmonary embolism
- History of VTE or pulmonary embolism in a close family member
- Use of oestrogen therapy—oral contraceptives (“the Pill”) or hormone replacement therapy (HRT)
- Pregnancy
- Recent surgery or trauma, particularly to the abdomen, pelvic region or legs
- Cancer
- Some inherited blood-clotting abnormalities

For additional information about this World Health Organization study, visit:

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/releases/2007/pr35/en/>