

PREVENTING BLOOD CLOTS WHILE TRAVELING

By Dr. George Khoury

If you take long trips by plane, you have probably seen in-flight videos about the importance of frequently leaving your seat. Avoiding prolonged sitting while traveling by airplane, bus, train, or car can help prevent an uncommon but potentially dangerous condition called deep venous thrombosis (DVT). This disorder can occur during travel, or it can occur several weeks later.

What is DVT?

DVT is a blood clot that forms in a leg, or less commonly, in the pelvis. This clot may break and move through the bloodstream to the lungs, where it can cut off the oxygen supply and lead to lung damage. We call this a pulmonary embolus.

What causes DVT?

In the case of travelers, DVT occurs when blood is not able to flow the way it should in a leg, because the leg is bent in such a way that blood can not move freely. In general, DVTs occur most in people who are over 40 years old, or are obese. Women who are pregnant, or are taking birth control pills or estrogen hormone therapy are also at risk.

What are the symptoms of DVT?

Pain, swelling, warmth and redness of only one leg are the symptoms of DVT. If these symptoms occur, go to the clinic or the ER quickly. If you have shortness of breath or chest pain (possibly due to pulmonary embolism), call 911.

How can I prevent DVT while traveling?

- When in a plane, bus, or train for more than 3 hours, stand up and take a short walk down the aisle every hour. If this is not convenient, do some leg exercises, such as bending the toes up and then relaxing them, or raising your heels while you press down on the front of your feet.
- When traveling by car for more than 3 hours, stop every hour and take a short walk.
- Avoid taking sleeping pills while traveling.
- Wear loose clothing.
- Keep your legs uncrossed.
- Drink plenty of water.
- If you have a medical condition that might increase your risk for blood clot, you might consider wearing compression stockings during the trip, or your doctor may give you a clot-preventing medication before you leave.