

PREVENTION OF DEEP VEIN THROMPBOIS (DVT) WHEN FLYING

There is evidence that there is increased of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) during long flights. DVT is a blood clot that occurs in deep veins in the body, usually the leg. This clot can be dangerous if part of it breaks away and reaches the heart. The exact reason for an increased risk of DVT while flying is not known. It is most likely to be due to the long period of immobility in a cramped space and there are suggestions that the reduced cabin pressure plays a role. The fact you smoke unfortunately puts you more at risk of developing a DVT.

The symptoms of DVT are pain and swelling, tenderness and redness at the back of the leg below the knee. Symptoms may develop hours, days, or in some cases several months after the flight. This is not the same as mild ankle swelling experienced by many during long flights.

There are some precautions you can take to prevent DVT during the flight. Exercises such as pressing the balls of your feet hard against the floor, or regularly bending and straightening your legs, feet and toes can help. Walking up and down the cabin at certain intervals during your flight is also a good idea. It is important not to get dehydrated during your flight. Drink plenty of water or juice but avoid alcohol, tea and coffee as these have a dehydrating effect. Avoid crossing your legs during the flight as this constricts veins and slows circulation. It is also recommended to avoid sleeping tablets as these can put you in a deep sleep making you immobile for a long time. Elastic compression stockings can improve your circulation and help lower risk of DVT. Compression stockings such as Scholl® flight Socks are available in many pharmacies.

I would not recommend taking aspirin to “thin” the blood before flying unless advised to do so by a medical practitioner. This is because some people are allergic to it and it can occasionally cause bleeding in the stomach. I am a big advocate of people taking low dose aspirin if they have risk factors for clots or heart disease. Taking one low dose aspirin a day reduces the risk of strokes and other cardiovascular events such as heart attacks. Risk factors include smoking, high blood pressure, being overweight, diabetes and a family history of heart disease. However a full assessment from your doctor is important before commencing aspirin.