

Flying Long Hours? Don't Just Sit There.



Deep Vein Thrombosis and Air Travel: What You Should Know

If you've ever stepped off a long flight feeling stiff or swollen, you're not alone—and you might've heard of deep vein thrombosis (DVT). It occurs when a blood clot forms in a deep vein, usually in the legs. While it's relatively rare, it can be serious.

Why It Matters in Aviation

Whether you're flying the plane or sitting in the cabin, long periods of sitting can reduce circulation in the legs, increasing the chance of clot formation. Most healthy people aren't at high risk, but the chances go up if you've recently had surgery, have certain medical conditions, or have a family history of blood clots.

Even just being immobile for 8–10 hours during a flight can contribute. One study estimated the risk of symptomatic DVT following a long-haul flight to be about 1 in 4,600. Not a big number, but not insignificant either—especially for frequent flyers.

What to Watch For

DVT symptoms don't always show up right away—they can appear days after a flight. Common signs include:

- Swelling (usually in one leg)
- Pain or tenderness
- Redness or warmth in the affected area

In some cases, the clot can travel to the lungs, causing a pulmonary embolism (PE)—a medical emergency. Signs of PE include:

- Sudden shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Rapid heartbeat
- Coughing up blood

⚠️ If any of these symptoms appear after travel, seek medical attention immediately.

Preventing DVT During Air Travel

Here are straightforward ways to reduce your risk, especially on long flights.

- Move regularly. Get up and walk every 1–2 hours. While seated, flex your feet, do ankle circles, or pump your calves.
 - Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water before and during the flight. Cut back on caffeine and alcohol—they dehydrate you.
 - Wear compression socks. Well-fitted compression stockings (15–30 mmHg) can support healthy blood flow.
 - Pick an aisle seat. Makes it easier to move about the cabin.
 - Dress comfortably. Avoid tight clothing that may restrict circulation.
 - Talk to your doctor. If you have a history of clots or any risk factors, check in before your next flight. They may recommend medication or other precautions.
-

Pro Tips for Aviation Professionals

If you fly regularly for work—or support those who do—these extra steps can help protect your health:

- Add movement to your pre/post-flight routine. A short walk or a few stretches can offset long hours in the air.
 - Pay attention to how you sit. Avoid crossing your legs or sitting on your feet, which can cut off circulation.
 - Pack a small mobility tool. A massage ball or resistance band can help with blood flow during layovers or downtime.
 - Be mindful of sleep meds. Sedatives can reduce movement; if used, take extra care to stay hydrated and wear compression socks.
 - Loosen your gear. Belts, holsters, or tight-fitting uniform items can restrict blood flow; relax them if you're seated for a while.
 - Track your risk over time. Consider scheduling a yearly check-in with your doctor, especially if your flight schedule is particularly demanding or your health has undergone changes.
-

Flying After a DVT?

Returning to air travel after a clot? Always consult your physician. Generally speaking:

- Wait at least two weeks after a DVT or pulmonary embolism before flying.
 - Only fly if you're stable on anticoagulant medication and asymptomatic.
 - Stay consistent with your treatment plan and carry your medications onboard.
-

Final Thoughts

DVT isn't something to panic about—but it is something to be aware of, especially if you or your colleagues are flying long distances regularly. A few small steps—literally—can go a long way in keeping everyone safe.

At WYVERN, we understand that safety isn't just technical—it's personal. Health and well-being are part of every safe flight.

If you are not subscribed to our weekly newsletters, subscribe now at the bottom of this page. For further resources and guidance on implementing Safety Management Systems, contact WYVERN, THE industry expert. Attend our [SMS Training Workshops](#) or

ask about our SMS software. [Contact us for a FREE SMS demo!](#) Together, we can elevate aerospace safety and create a safer future.