

TRAVEL HEALTH • VASCULAR
AWARENESS

The Hidden Risk *Beneath Your Seat*

*What every traveller needs to know about
Deep Vein Thrombosis — and how to keep
your journeys safe.*

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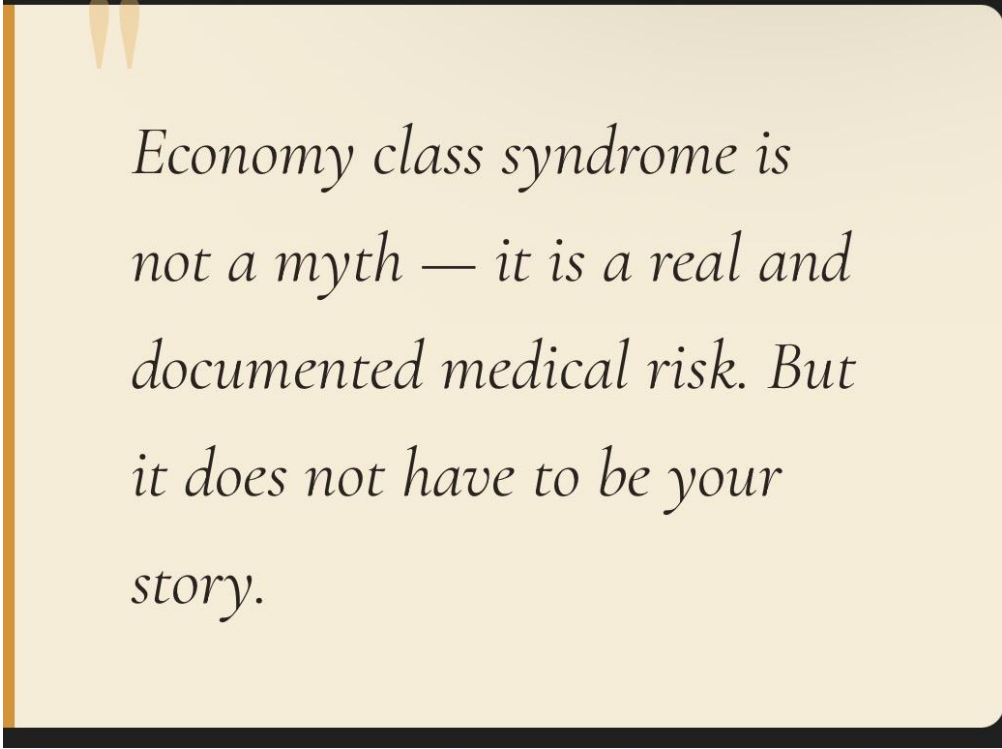
UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITION
What Exactly Is DVT?

Deep Vein Thrombosis — DVT — occurs when a blood clot forms in one of the deep veins of the body, most commonly in the calf or thigh. While the clot itself is serious, the real danger lies in its potential to break free and travel to the lungs, causing a life-threatening condition called a Pulmonary Embolism (PE).

For travellers, the concern is very real. Long hours of immobility — whether in a plane, a car, or a train — slow the circulation of blood in your legs. Combine that with cabin dehydration, cramped seating, and reduced cabin pressure, and you have a perfect environment for clot formation.



The reassuring truth? DVT is largely preventable. Understanding your risk and taking a few simple precautions can make all the difference between a memorable journey and a medical emergency.



Economy class syndrome is not a myth — it is a real and documented medical risk. But it does not have to be your story.

THE SCIENCE, SIMPLY

Why Does Travel Trigger Clots?

Your body's blood circulation relies on muscle movement — especially the leg muscles — to pump blood back toward the heart against gravity. When you sit still for hours, this natural pump stops working efficiently.

Physicians use Virchow's Triad to explain clot formation — a trio of factors that, when combined, dramatically increase clotting risk:

Three Forces at Play



Sluggish Blood Flow

Sitting still for long periods causes blood to pool in the deep veins of the legs, slowing circulation significantly.



Cabin Dehydration

Low cabin humidity draws moisture from the body, thickening the blood and making it more prone to clotting.



Vein Wall Pressure

Cramped seating places direct pressure on the backs of the knees, compressing major veins and further impeding flow.

While DVT can affect anyone on a long journey, certain individuals carry a significantly elevated risk. If any of these apply to you, speak with your doctor before your next long-haul trip.



Age Over 40

Vascular tone and circulation efficiency decrease naturally with age, raising baseline clotting risk.



Pregnancy

Pregnancy raises clotting factors and adds pelvic pressure on major vessels — a significant combination.



Obesity

Higher body weight increases pressure on pelvic veins and is associated with pro-inflammatory states.



Recent Surgery or Illness

Post-operative or post-illness states activate the clotting cascade, amplifying travel-related risk.



Inherited Clotting Disorders

Conditions like Factor V Leiden or Protein C deficiency are often undiagnosed but carry high DVT risk.

RECOGNISE THE SIGNS
Warning Signs You Should Never Ignore

DVT can be deceptively quiet — many clots cause no symptoms at all. However, when signs do appear, they demand immediate attention. Learn to recognise them in yourself and those travelling with you.

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- **Swelling in One Leg**

Unilateral swelling — particularly of the calf or ankle — is one of the most common DVT presentations. Two-sided swelling is less suspicious.

- **Pain or Tenderness**

A dull ache, cramping, or tenderness in the calf or thigh that wasn't there before, especially after prolonged sitting.

- **Warmth & Redness**

The skin over the affected area may feel noticeably warmer than surrounding tissue, and may appear red or discoloured.

- **Leg Heaviness**

A sensation of heaviness, fullness, or fatigue in the leg — distinct from the usual tiredness of long travel.



Signs of Pulmonary Embolism — Call Emergency Services Immediately

If a clot breaks off and reaches the lungs, symptoms include sudden shortness of breath, sharp chest pain that worsens with deep breathing, a rapid or irregular heartbeat, dizziness, or coughing up blood. This is a life-threatening emergency. Do not wait.

STAY MOVING AT 35,000 FEET
Simple In-Flight Exercises

You don't need to do yoga in the aisle. These gentle, seat-

friendly movements keep blood circulating and take less than two minutes every hour.



Ankle Circles

Lift both feet slightly off the floor and rotate at the ankles — 10 circles clockwise, 10 anti-clockwise. Repeat every hour. This directly activates the calf pump.



Heel-Toe Raises

With feet flat, alternate lifting your heels (toes stay down), then lifting your toes (heels stay down). Do 20 repetitions. Mimics the action of walking to stimulate venous return.



Seated Knee Lifts

Lift one knee toward your chest, hold for 3 seconds, lower. Alternate legs, 10 times each. Engages your thigh muscles and decompresses the femoral vein.



Aisle Walks

Stand and walk the length of the aisle every 1–2 hours when the seatbelt sign is off. Even 60 seconds of walking dramatically improves circulation.



Calf Presses

Press the balls of your feet firmly into the floor and tighten your calf muscles for 5 seconds, then release. Do 15 repetitions. Works even with limited legroom.

8 Things to Do Before & During Travel

01

Stay Well Hydrated

Drink at least 200–250 ml of water every hour in flight. Avoid alcohol and excess caffeine, which accelerate dehydration and constrict blood vessels.

02

Wear Compression Stockings

Class I graduated compression stockings (15–20 mmHg) are clinically proven to reduce DVT risk on long-haul flights. Start wearing them before boarding.

03

Choose Your Seat Wisely

An aisle seat allows easier leg movement and encourages you to walk more frequently. Window seats, while scenic, can trap you in immobility.

04

Avoid Crossing Your Legs

Crossing legs compresses the popliteal vein behind the knee. Keep feet flat on the floor or on a footrest when possible.

05

Move Every Hour

Set a timer. Stretch, exercise in your seat, or walk the aisle every 60–90 minutes without fail — regardless of how comfortable you feel.

06

Talk to Your Doctor

High-risk travellers may benefit from low-dose aspirin or prescribed anticoagulants for long-haul flights. Always seek medical advice before self-medicating.

07

Dress Comfortably

Loose, non-restrictive clothing supports circulation. Avoid tight waistbands, constrictive jeans, or anything that presses on the groin or thighs.

08

Continue Vigilance After Landing

DVT symptoms can appear 24–72 hours after a flight. If you notice swelling, pain, or redness in a leg after travel, do not dismiss it — seek medical evaluation promptly.

YOUR TRAVEL CHECKLIST

Ready to Fly Safely?

Travel is one of life's great joys. With a little awareness and preparation, DVT doesn't have to be part of your journey. Carry this checklist with you.

- ✓ Spoken to doctor if I'm at high risk
- ✓ Packed compression stockings
- ✓ Booked an aisle seat where possible
- ✓ Planning to hydrate every hour
- ✓ Scheduled movement reminders
- ✓ Know the warning signs — and when to act



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This article is intended for general health education and awareness purposes only. It does not constitute medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you have specific concerns about DVT or travel-related health risks, please consult your physician before travelling.