

Surgery, Travel and Deep Vein Thrombosis

What is Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT)?

A DVT is a blood clot in your leg. This can lead to a pulmonary embolus (PE) - a clot in your lung. These are treatable with blood thinning medicines such as heparin or Warfarin; however in rare instances they can be fatal.

Risks

There is a small risk of developing a DVT after surgery and also after long journeys, especially flying. The risk increases as the journey time lengthens (especially after 4 hours) and includes all modes of transport where you sit still. This risk will vary from person to person and depends on factors such as: having had a previous DVT, family history of DVT, obesity, pregnancy, cancer or recent surgery.

Travelling before an operation

It is possible to get a DVT after a long journey. This could be a serious problem if you have an operation within a few weeks of a long journey. Please inform your surgeon or pre-assessment nurse if you have or intend to travel for more than 4 hours continuously in the 4 weeks before your operation. **Your operation may need to be postponed to prevent additional risk or complication.**

Travelling after an operation

If you are having an operation with a general anaesthetic that lasts longer than 30 minutes it is advisable to wait at least 4 weeks after your operation before you travel **greater than 4 hours continuously**. If you travel between 1 and 2 months after an operation then you are advised to wear compression stockings.

If you are having a hip or knee replacement it is advisable to wait 3 months after your surgery before you travel. This may mean that either your operation or holiday may need to be postponed. Please inform your surgeon or pre-assessment nurse if you are intending to travel greater than 4 hours in the 3 months after your operation so an appropriate date can be booked.

General advice to decrease the risk of DVT during long journeys

- Avoid immobility.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes.

- While seated bend and straighten legs every 30 minutes.
- Keep feet area free.
- Press balls of feet down hard against floor to increase blood flow.
- Do upper body breathing exercises.
- Take occasional short walks.
- Avoid sleeping tablets.
- Drink more water and avoid alcohol.
- Seek urgent medical advice if you develop swollen painful leg/breathlessness/chest pain.

Post-Operative travel guidance

There are published guidelines by the Civil Aviation Authority on travelling after an operation. These do not relate to DVT risk but the risk after surgery and travelling. <https://www.caa.co.uk/Passengers/Before-you-fly/Am-I-fit-to-fly/Health-information-for-passengers/Passenger-health-FAQs--The-aircraft-cabin---your-health-and-comfort/>

- **It is your responsibility to inform the Travel Company and Medical Insurance Company about recent surgery.**

For more information:

NICE <https://cks.nice.org.uk/topics/dvt-prevention-for-travellers/management/dvt-prevention-for-travellers/>

Last revised - 2023

