

Patient Information Sheet

FLYING AFTER SURGERY - REDUCING THE DVT RISK

DVTs

A Deep Venous Thrombosis is a blood clot that has formed in a calf muscle vein. DVTs cause calf swelling and pain but are generally not dangerous.

PE

A Pulmonary Embolus is a DVT that has broken off and travelled to the lungs. PEs cause chest pain and breathlessness and may be fatal.

Reducing the risk of DVT formation is very important.

Causes of DVT

1. Increased platelet stickiness –
Surgery causes platelets to adhere more easily to blood vessel walls.
2. Blood vessel wall damage –
The surgical tourniquet compresses the vessel wall to stop blood flow.
3. Reduced blood flow –
Sitting immobile for a long period causes blood to pool in the legs.
4. Increased blood viscosity –
Not drinking enough fluids or consuming alcohol will thicken the blood.

Risk

There is double the normal risk of developing a DVT for 6 months after surgery.

Air travel substantially increases this risk due to –

- **prolonged sitting**
- **dehydration in the cabin environment**
- **alcohol consumption.**

Prevention

The best way to prevent a DVT is to delay air travel for 6 months after surgery.

If air travel is unavoidable then the following will minimise the DVT risk –

1. **Take half an Aspirin (150mg) the day prior to, the day of and the day after the flight.**
2. **Wear *Flight Socks* (compressive hosiery) during the flight.**
3. **Exercise every 2 hours during the flight.**
4. **Drink water regularly and do not consume alcohol during the flight.**

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