

MEDIA RELEASE

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Flying and thrombosis: preventing blood clots in travellers at high risk

Travellers at higher risk of developing deep vein thrombosis (DVT) and fatal blood clots during long journeys may benefit from taking medicines before departure, according to Dr Frank Firkin and Dr Harshal Nandurkar of St Vincent's Hospital Melbourne, writing in the latest edition of *Australian Prescriber*.

The risk of DVT is increased during long-haul flights (flights of more than four hours), and can remain a risk several weeks afterwards. Approximately one case of clinically-confirmed DVT occurs in every 4500 long-haul flights.

Those with a higher risk of DVT are women on the contraceptive pill, people with a personal or family history of blood clots, and those with cancer or heart disease or who have recently undergone surgery. Smoking, dehydration, obesity and varicose veins can also increase risk.

While walking around the cabin may reduce the risk of DVT, movement can be difficult on a crowded plane, and it is unknown how effective doing leg exercises while seated is at preventing these conditions.

While it has been thought aspirin may protect against DVT, the authors say there is no evidence for this. They recommend doctors consider giving travellers at high risk of DVT preventative medicines (anticoagulants) such as heparin.

The authors conclude that while those at high risk of DVT may benefit from anticoagulants, these medicines have not been shown to benefit travellers with a low risk of developing DVT.

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