

STAY FIT ON THE FLY

by Kyle Battis

Travel can present a challenge for all of us, including the most dedicated fitness or health conscious individual.

The effects of jet lag, missed meals made up by too much fast food, not enough sleep and a lack of exercise can all take a toll. But with some helpful hints in hand and a little forethought, even the frequent flyer can manage to stay on track with dietary and work out concerns.

Traveler's Thrombosis

“Traveler's Thrombosis” is another name for Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT), a serious and sometimes life threatening condition. DVT is a blood clot that develops in a deep vein, usually in the leg, which can happen if the vein is damaged or if the flow of blood slows down or stops. When blood flows back up through the veins from the lower legs towards the heart, this return trip is a little more difficult because it now has to fight against gravity, an ‘uphill climb’ if you will. The Soleus muscle in your calf is known as your body's “second heart” because every time it contracts it aids in pumping the blood out of the legs back towards the heart; however, if these pumps stay idle for too long the formation of a DVT is more likely.

The risk of DVT is attributed predominantly to immobility such as in prolonged post-operative bed rest, but a significant incidence is also related to lengthy travel, particularly on planes where other factors such as low oxygen tension, low humidity, low cabin pressure and excessive consumption of coffee and alcohol can further add to the problem. It has been found that long distance flights are 2 to 3 times more likely to cause DVTs to occur.

NOTE: IF YOU DEVELOP SWELLING OR PAIN IN THE LEG, OR BREATHING PROBLEMS AFTER TRAVELING, SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE IMMEDIATELY.

Preventive Measures for DVT

Although the added risk of developing a DVT caused by traveling appears to be low, it can be reduced even further by exercising the legs at least once every hour during long-distance travel.

Be sure to take regular breaks if driving for long distances. Stop frequently to take short walks and stretch breaks. On a bus, train or plane periodically walk up and down the aisle and do these light exercises in your seat:

- Tense and contract all muscles of your body, then relax them;
- With the feet on the floor, pull the toes towards the knees, then relax them;
- Press the balls of the feet down while raising the heel. These calf raises are very important when it comes to preventing DVTs.
- Avoid taking sleeping pills. These cause immobility and can increase the risk of DVT.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Keep the legs uncrossed (crossing the legs can impede blood flow and increase risk).
- Drink water. Stay hydrated but skip the coffee and cocktails and have water instead. Take a bottle on board so you can sip frequently to counteract the extra dry air on the plane.
- If you have other risk factors for a DVT be sure to talk with your doctor before traveling. He/she may recommend that you wear graduated compression stockings (TEDs).
- Some doctors recommend taking aspirin before traveling for of its blood-thinning effects but be sure to seek the advice of your own physician about this.