

Deep vein thrombosis is a threat to travelers

It might not be such a good idea to catch some ZZZs on your next flight. Especially if you are overweight, suffer from chronic disease or have undergone surgery to lower extremities, sitting in one position while traveling can lead to a dangerous condition called deep vein thrombosis (DVT). DVT can be fatal if not treated properly.

“DVT is inflammation and the development of a blood clot in a deep vein, usually in one of the lower extremities,” said Dr. Michael Zimring, director of the Center for Wilderness and Travel Medicine at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore.

Caused by the slowing of blood flow from prolonged inactivity, the condition can lead to a clot transported through the bloodstream to the lungs where it can become a pulmonary embolism, Dr. Zimring said.

To prevent DVT, Dr. Zimring said it is important to stay well hydrated, avoiding alcohol and caffeine. Individuals should perform simple stretching exercises on long flights and also take frequent walks around the cabin, he said. Dr. Zimring advised against crossing legs because it can cut off circulation.

Some DVT warning signs include pain or swelling in the calf and pain while flexing the muscles in that area, said Dr. Zimring. Sometimes symptoms may not appear right away, he said, occurring several weeks after traveling.

While it might not appear to be an obvious way of protecting against DVT, Dr. Zimring said it is critical to purchase travel insurance. The cost is only about \$4 a day, he said. Dr. Zimring recalled one woman who broke her kneecap while vacationing in Mexico. She didn't have travel insurance. While the surgery in Mexico was successful, because she was improperly transported back to the United States, she developed a pulmonary embolism from DVT, Dr. Zimring said.

“With proper insurance, she would have been evacuated to the U.S. and transported properly,” said Dr. Zimring, author of “Healthy Travel: Don't Travel Without it.”

“She almost died,” he said. “The point is – get the proper travel advice from a travel physician before you leave.”

According to the American Heart Association, nearly 2 million Americans are affected annually by DVT. Of those who develop a pulmonary embolism, about 200,000 will die.

For more information, visit www.travelmedicineMD.com.