



The dangers of being desk bound

Research just out suggests that those of us who spend long hours working at a desk are more likely to develop deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

It was previously thought that DVT mainly struck passengers on long haul plane flights - not anymore. We look at the ways you can avoid this new office danger.

Sitting at a desk for hours working at a computer may earn you brownie points with your boss, but doctors are now warning that it could also damage your health. While most of us are aware of the risks of sore eyes or a stiff neck, it now appears that lack of movement could make millions of workers vulnerable to a new health risk - 'e-thrombosis'.

E-thrombosis is a type of [deep vein thrombosis](#) (DVT), and is the same condition known to affect airline passengers which has killed several apparently healthy passengers. Thrombosis, or blood clots, form when people are sitting for long periods in one place, especially where the legs may be cramped or circulation restricted.

DVT has previously been linked with long haul air travel and with the elderly, but research just out of New Zealand suggests that office workers are also at risk.

A study at the Medical Research Institute in Wellington, New Zealand, examined the cases of 62 people with DVT and discovered that 34 per cent had spent long periods sitting at their desks at work.

Lead researcher professor Richard Beasley said that research participants reported working for up to 14 hours a day and "going three to four hours at a time without getting up". The scientists also found that the condition was most common among call centre workers and other in the information technology sector.

Dr Beverley Hunt, Medical Director for thrombosis charity [Lifeblood](#) says: "Sitting for very long periods in an office has never been considered a risk before, but immobility is a key factor in causing thrombosis."

Hunt says thrombosis is "a hidden, silent epidemic." Each year up to one in every 1,000 people in the UK is affected by a blood clot in the veins, and 60,000 a year die from it.

"People are moving around less and it's not uncommon for someone to spend hours sitting at work and then go home and sit and watch television or play computer games," she says. "This adds up to huge stretches of immobility and adds to the risk of a clot forming."

Dr John Scurr, a consultant vascular surgeon at London's Lister Hospital, also believes that the condition will become increasingly recognised among office workers.

"Potentially this is a big problem with millions at risk because the trend is for a sedentary lifestyle, particularly at work, where long hours sitting in front of a screen are the norm," he said. "In the last nine months I've seen around seven cases of people suffering from this. Some of them are City brokers or lawyers who think nothing of 12 to 14 hours a day working on a computer."

What is e-thrombosis?

- 1 - A deep vein thrombosis is a blood clot that develops in a deep vein, usually in the lower leg.
- 2 - In most cases of DVT, the clots are small and do not cause any symptoms. The body is able to gradually break down the clot and there are no long-term effects, but in less common cases it can lodge in the lung with potentially fatal effects.
- 3 - Until now DVT has only been recognised as a risk for air travellers and hospital patients, particularly those confined to bed following operations such as hip or knee surgery.

The risk factors

- 1 - Sitting at a desk without a break or movement for hours.
- 2 - Those who have had DVT in the past, or those who are prone to blood clots possibly because of a hereditary cause. Around 10% of people in the UK have thrombophilia,

a condition which makes them vulnerable to blood clots.

3 - If you have recently been travelling.

4 - If you have recently suffered from a serious illness or from a debilitating virus.

5 - If you are dehydrated.

What are the symptoms?

1 - You should consult a doctor if you have any of the following symptoms:

2 - A swelling of the calf - this is usually different from the mild ankle swelling that many people get during long haul flights.

3 - A pain in the calf which is noticeable and becomes worse when standing or walking.

4 - Larger clots may partially or totally block the blood flow in the vein or less commonly but in more serious cases a clot can lodge in the lungs, preventing blood flow and causing chest pain and shortness of breath. This requires emergency treatment.

5 - If a DVT damages the valves in the vein, so that instead of flowing upwards, the blood pools in the lower leg. This can result in pain, swelling and ulcers on the leg.

What is the treatment?

DVT is highly treatable and anticoagulant medicines are the most common treatment. These alter certain chemicals in the blood to stop clots forming so easily. Anticoagulants include Heparin which may be followed later by Warfarin.

What can I do to avoid it?

1 - Always take a tea break away from the computer, and avoid lurching at your desk. Instead walk around and stretch your legs. Cardiovascular exercise not only lowers the blood pressure, but also reduces the risk of clots building up in the first place. So also make sure you exercise at least three or four times a week before or after work to further decrease your DVT risk.

2 - Drink plenty of fluid, at least eight glasses a day, to avoid dehydration, one of the risk factors involved in DVT.

3 - Take an anti-DVT daily supplement. Zinopin Daily has already been tested on flight passengers for its anti-DVT effects. Zinopin Daily contains a blueberry complex, pine bark and ginger, which work together to help prevent blood clots and keep blood vessels in good condition as a protection against DVT. It's available from Lloyds pharmacies, Tesco's and Superdrug stores nationwide and costs £14.99 for a month's supply.

4 - Walking around only five to 10 minutes each hour could substantially reduce your risk of e-thrombosis.

Workplace solutions

- 1 - As it's easy to get too comfortable at your desk, making it harder for you to leave it, try to replace your desk with a smaller, 'just big enough', desk.
 - 2 - Move equipment like a fax and copier further away so that you are more likely to walk around as you do your job. Get a phone with a wireless headset that allows you to pace during phone conversations.
 - 3 - If your work environment permits it, have music on in the background so you can tap your feet along to it, which will keep the muscle in your lower legs working and help prevent blood pooling in your lower limbs.
 - 4 - Crossing your legs or having your legs pinned firmly together and tucked up under your seat might look ladylike but these sitting stances inhibit circulation to your lower legs, especially if you are also wearing tight trousers or a tight skirt.
 - 5 - When sitting make sure your legs are either bent slightly at the knee with legs slightly apart or stretched out straight in front of you again with legs slightly apart.
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