

HOW TO AVOID BLOOD CLOTS (DVT) ON YOUR NEXT FLIGHT

BY MATT MELTZER



SHUTTERSTOCK

Much like [being a Miami Dolphins fan](#), flying really hasn't been much fun [since the 1980s](#). And [studies prove it](#). Because in addition to making you [look and feel your absolute worst](#), it also does some [seriously messed-up stuff to your body](#). And the most terrifying of that messed-up stuff? Deep vein thrombosis (or DVT) – commonly known as “economy class syndrome.”

DVT happens when your blood – typically dehydrated and thicker at high altitudes – clots after extended periods of inactivity, i.e., sitting in a cramped seat for four hours. If said clot makes its way to your lungs, it can lead to a pulmonary embolism and potentially kill you. According to the Centers for Disease Control, an estimated 60,000-100,000 Americans die from DVT each year. And while there's no way to know how many of those are directly related to air travel, you'd best not chance it.

That's not to say your cross-country jaunt to Coachella is going to land you in the emergency room. But it does mean you should take some small precautions to minimize the risks. We talked to Dr. Luis Navarro, director of [the Vein Treatment Center](#) in New York, NY, who gave us some helpful tips to prevent blood clots during flights.



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Don't drink on the plane

Remember that time we told you [why you shouldn't drink on an airplane](#)? Yeah, we weren't joking. Fun as Dierks Bentley might make it sound, drinking on the plane dehydrates you, which makes your blood all sludge-like, and way more likely to clot. Caffeine has the same effect, so opt for the Sprite Zero instead of Diet Coke or, heaven forbid, something crazy like [juice or water](#).

Wear compression stockings

“They act like an added layer of muscle, aiding the performance of the ['second heart'](#) [muscles and veins in the calf and foot] and venous circulation,” says Dr. Navarro. Make sure you buy graduated stockings, however, that are tighter around your ankles and looser as they taper up to your thigh; these keep blood from pooling at your feet and ankles, but allow for more blood flow than plain old spandex tights. You can find them at medical supply stores and pharmacies.

Stay active

We're not saying do yoga in the aisle, because then [everyone will hate you](#). But on a long flight, Dr. Navarro recommends walking around every hour. This might be your long-awaited chance to [chat up the flight attendants](#) in the galley, but if you're not that social, stay in your seat and do ankle raises/rotations or foot pumps, or go into the lavatory and do leg raises.

Stay cool

Make sure the air vent above your head is open all the way, all the time. Even if you're not the kind of person to run the A/C, make an exception on the plane. When your veins dilate from being too hot, you sweat to cool off. And as a result, those veins become less able to pull blood out of surrounding tissue and the chances of blood pooling in your legs goes up.



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Avoid high-salt foods

“Unhealthy foods packed with salt can cause constipation, which puts pressure on the venous system,” says Dr. Navarro. So as inviting as that [Popeyes chicken](#) or Chick-fil-A looks during your two-hour layover in Atlanta, maybe just opt for a salad.

Keep the area under your seat clear

So, you thought you'd be clever and pack two weeks' worth of clothes into your “carry-on” and stuff that oversized bad boy in the overhead bin. But wait, now your “personal item” is full of books, computer gear, and stolen copies of [SkyMall](#), and it's taking up all the room under your seat. Which means no room to exercise your feet. Shell out the \$25, check a bag, and save yourself the blood clots. Or, bring fewer copies of *The Da Vinci Code*.

Rinse your legs in cold water

Obviously, don't do this ON the plane or you're going to end up on [this list](#). But once you get to a place where you can rinse off in private, deluge your legs, ankles, and feet in cold water. This will force your veins to contract and thus reduce swelling, similar to a pitcher icing down his arm after a long game.