



A series of bulletins intended to keep members informed and safe

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Subject: Sitting on the Job – The Risks of Deep Vein Thrombosis

Workers in call centre and office environments who spend long hours in a seated position – not moving – may have an increased risk of Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT). This is a condition where a clot forms in a large vein after prolonged sitting. It is commonly associated with long haul air travelers and can cause discomfort or pain, or worse, a fatal heart attack or stroke.

Sedentary workers are at increased risk, because sitting impedes the blood flow. Having “fidgety legs” and feeling the urge to get up and move is often our body’s way of telling us to recirculate the blood in our legs.

DVT affects mainly the veins in the lower leg and thigh. When a clot forms in these larger veins it can interfere with circulation. The danger occurs if the clot breaks off, travels through the bloodstream and lodges into the brain, lungs, heart, or other area, causing severe damage to that organ or possible death from a heart attack or stroke.

Who is at risk?

Aside from prolonged sitting at work, there are other risk factors that may increase the risk of DVT:

- People with an inherited or acquired blood clotting disorder.
- A slowed blood flow in a deep vein (from injury, surgery or immobilization).
- People with cancer and undergoing treatment.
- If you’re pregnant or have had a baby in the last 6 months.
- Being overweight.
- Taking birth control pills or hormone therapy.
- People over the age of 60.
- Anyone who is seated and immobile for long periods on a plane, car trip, in a chair or bed.

Symptoms

DVT symptoms are similar to those for other conditions, making it difficult to diagnose without specific tests. Symptoms may include pain, tenderness or swelling in one leg, increased warmth of one leg, or redness in one leg. Half of the DVT episodes produce minimal symptoms or none at all.

If you experience any of these symptoms, see your doctor. If you experience chest pain, difficulty breathing, fainting, loss of consciousness or other severe symptoms, go to the emergency room or call 911.

Prevention

If you work in a job that has you deskbound for hours at a time, make sure to get up and move around every hour to get that blood circulating! People who have already experienced DVT can prevent further episodes by taking doctor prescribed medication with regular follow-up appointments. If you are prone to blood clots or have had surgery, your doctor can prescribe medication to prevent or treat blood clots.

TWU National Health & Safety Committee