



SERIOUSLY SICK? JUST DRIVING HOME FROM A TRIP?

By Brian Hunter

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS?

Sure, I had heard of it but I never knew anyone who had one. I'm in good health and I never considered the possibility it would happen to me. A deep vein thrombosis, sometimes called a DVT or a blood clot, did happen to me. You could get one too. I was lucky; mine did not break off and end up in my heart or a lung, which can happen and which will cause severe problems or death.



WHAT HAPPENED?

I went on an eight-day kayak camping trip with RMSKC in August of 2009. The trip was fantastic! We had a great bunch of people, good weather and very few mosquitoes. The drive out was broken up into two days so that we would get to the park in the early afternoon to check in, but we drove back home in one long day switching drivers several times.

A few days after getting back I had a minor ache in my right calf, the next day it was more noticeable but still not painful. I shrugged it off as a symptom of age and figured it would go away on its own. The following day it was a little worse but by that evening my calf had swollen noticeably. At this point I went to the emergency room to discover I had a DVT.

Although some people with DVTs have no pain at all, I was in extreme pain for three weeks. For those first few weeks I was bed-ridden or wheelchair-bound. I had to give myself Heparin injections for a week and I took Warfarin for six months. (Heparin works to turn off the clotting system, Warfarin works to keep the clotting system from becoming activated once it has been turned off.)

HOW DID THE KAYAK TRIP CONTRIBUTE TO MY DVT?

- As often happens, I became mildly dehydrated during the eight days on the water.
- On the way home I was in my vehicle for over ten hours without getting out to walk around and exercise my calf muscles.

BRIAN SAYS: Keep in mind that I am not offering medical advice, just sharing my experience with you. This is a serious matter you should discuss with your doctor.

WHAT SHOULD PEOPLE LEARN FROM THIS?

If you suspect a DVT get medical help immediately; there is no time to delay. Here is a list of the symptoms but beware, some people have no symptoms or they are so minor they ignore them:

- Swelling in one or both legs
- Pain or tenderness in one or both legs, which may occur only while standing or walking
- Warmth in the skin of the affected leg
- Red or discolored skin in the affected leg
- Visible surface veins
- Leg fatigue

A DVT can happen to anyone, and a few simple steps can go a long way toward prevention. To lower your risk and help prevent a serious clot, take these steps:

- Maintain an active lifestyle with regular exercise. Walking, swimming, dancing, bicycling and kayaking are all great activities.
- Remain well-hydrated while driving or flying, remembering exercise requires more fluid intake than usual.
- Discuss your family or personal history of blood-clotting problems with your doctor and follow his or her advice.
- If you are going on a long road trip, stop every 90 minutes or less, get out and walk around. If you are on a long flight, move your legs and feet to contract your calf muscles and move blood back toward the heart.
- Wearing compression stockings can actually reduce the risk of a travel DVT on long car trips or flights. The slight pressure applied from the socks helps to prevent blood from pooling in the legs. Check with your doctor for the correct type of stockings and remember that they will not replace the benefits of doing regular exercise while driving or flying.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

Don't think for a minute that "it won't happen to me". Take simple steps to prevent a DVT and you will be preventing a whole host of other health problems at the same time. Live long, prosper and kayak in health!

BLOOD CHEMISTRY AND CLOT FORMATION:

Human blood is made up of four main parts: red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, and plasma. Platelets combine with other proteins to form clots which prevent bleeding. Under some circumstances small clots can grow into plugs that stop blood flow in veins and arteries. Plasma is the liquid that transports all the blood components throughout the body. Plasma is about 90% water which explains why staying hydrated is important.

DVTs form in veins deep in the groin or leg. Since the heart is not capable of pumping blood from the legs back up the body to the lungs there are valves in the veins that only allow flow in one direction. Each time muscles in the legs contract it forces some blood past these valves back toward the heart. If there is insufficient blood flow around these valves a clot can start to form. Sitting for long periods of time means the leg muscles are not contracting to move blood back to the heart.