

SENIOR FITNESS

Reducing the Risk of DVT

By
Jim Evans

DEAR JIM: A dear friend of mine – she was just 58 – recently died of DVT. I’ve never heard of it before. What in the world is it, anyway? **EMBARASSED IN EUCLID**

DEAR EMBARRASSED: You are not alone. Almost 75% of adults are not familiar with DVT - short for Deep-Vein or Deep Venous Thrombosis. It’s a mouthful, isn’t it!?!

DVT refers to a blood clot in the legs – specifically in a “deep vein” (a vein that accompanies an artery). A clot (thrombosis), of course, can interfere with normal blood circulation, but a more serious problem occurs when the clot breaks off and travels through the blood stream (embolism) lodging itself in a critical organ such as the brain, lungs, or heart causing serious or even fatal damage – usually in the form of a pulmonary embolism. Although DVT can occur in any age group, it occurs most frequently among adults over 60.

According to the American Medical Association, more than 600,000 people suffer from DVT in this country every year, of which at least 60,000 will die from pulmonary embolisms. The symptoms might include leg pain or tenderness in one leg, swelling, increased warmth in one leg, or even changes in the skin color of one leg. Symptoms might not occur right away and might even take hours – or even days – before showing up.

DVT is usually associated with confined or relatively immobile situations such as driving for long distances or sitting at a computer desk for extended periods of time, but it can occur even in a hospital bed. Not surprising, DVT has become so associated with cramped airline seats that it is sometimes referred to as “economy class syndrome.” It is the relative immobility – the lack of physical activity – that apparently precipitates the clotting even in otherwise healthy individuals, although physical conditions such as obesity, smoking, high blood pressure, or even birth control pills may exacerbate the possibility of DVT (MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia).

The best way to prevent DVT? Exercise. Why? Because physical activity stimulates circulation and prevents the formation of dangerous clots. Other suggestions? Wear loose-fitting clothes, take periodic breaks to stretch and move around when confined or when sitting too long in one place, and stay well hydrated. Compression stockings or support hose can also help.

Anticoagulants and other medications can sometimes be effective in the treatment of DVT to prevent the development of pulmonary embolism but, because of the life-threatening risk inherent in DVT, it is imperative to seek prompt medical treatment if symptoms appear. For more information about DVT, talk to your doctor or refer to www.dvt.com.

Jim Evans is a 38-year veteran of the health and fitness industry and a nationally recognized fitness consultant. He is also chairman of the advisory council for the Retired & Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP) of San Diego County and host of the popular radio talk show “Forever Young” on San Diego’s KCBQ 1170 AM (www.fyradio.biz) focusing on issues of health, fitness, and quality of life.