

Are you sitting comfortably?  
Inflight September 2001

Cathrine Fracchia examines how the airline industry is reacting to protect passengers from DVT.

Airlines and the inflight industry are working hard to ensure that the flying public's experience of long-haul travel is as relaxing and pleasurable as possible. The on-screen visual entertainment gets more varied and exiting by the month. Aural stimulation ranges from rock to classic tracks and comedy. Even in gastronomic terms, the taste experience has largely improved.

However, the burst of recent of recent media coverage has shown that a medical phenomenon is shadowing the pleasure of travelling. Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) is a condition not unknown to the medical sector but which remains a 'hot topic' in the airline industry (see Inflight, p51, June 2001). When flying long distances, passengers tend to remain in the same position, often cramped if in economy, for long hours leaving the body inactive. Such inactivity is not just restricted to air travel. Journeys by train, coach and even car can also trigger DVT. Even bedridden hospital patients are at risk. Immobility in any of these scenarios may activate blood clots in the lower leg, causing severe health problems. Not a very comfortable prospect to think about seven hours into an 11 hour flight. The alarm bells are ringing and the the search is on to provide passengers with some form of protection.

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One aspect of comfort often overlooked, and of vital importance is air quality in the cabin. Dehydration is thought to contribute to DVT, hence the airlines focus on distributing drinking water and discouraging excessive consumption of alcohol drinks. Although travelling at 35,000 feet, the air in the cabin must be adjusted to be of similar consistency to the air we breathe on the ground. CTT Systems in Sweden specialises in controlling the humidity and, at that same time, the condensation present in the aircraft. Although no specific data links the humidity level to DVT, CTT's Zonal Comfort System provides increased humidity levels from the usual 5% in cabin up to a minimum 25% relative humidity (RH). Gunnar Nilsson, director, Sales & Marketing at CTT explains: "As far as we understand your body and the blood in your veins are less affected if the humidity is higher. Bare in mind that we want somewhere between 30-50% RH to feel comfortable." This means better sleep, fewer skin problems, less de-hydration and, of course, passengers need to drink less water.

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