

Information leaflet on

Travelling in Early Pregnancy



By your side

Who is this information for?

This information is for you if you are considering travelling when pregnant. The information is relevant for all length of flights.

When is the safest time to fly during pregnancy?

- Before 37 weeks if you are carrying one baby. From 37 weeks of pregnancy, the chance of you going into labour is significantly increased – which is why many women choose not to fly after this time. Some airlines do not allow women to fly after 37 weeks, while others do not allow women to fly earlier in the pregnancy, for example after 34 weeks. You may find it more difficult to get travel insurance after 37 weeks.
- Before 34 weeks if you are carrying an uncomplicated twin pregnancy.

Will flying harm me or my baby?

Some common problems can be:

- Swelling of your legs due to fluid retention.
- Nasal congestion. During pregnancy you are more likely to be congested and combine this with the lowered air pressure in the plane can cause you to experience problems with your ears.
- Pregnancy sickness. If you experience motion sickness during the flight, it can make your pregnancy sickness worse.
- Deep Vein Thrombosis in your leg, calf or pelvis.

Circumstances when you should not fly

- You have severe anaemia.
- You are affected with sickle cell anaemia +/- you have recently had a sickling crisis.
- Recently had significant vaginal bleeding.
- You are affected with a serious condition affecting your lungs or heart.
- You have recently had surgery to your abdomen.
- If you have a fracture.

If you are taking a short-haul flight/car journey <4hrs it is unlikely that you will need to take any special measures. If your flight/car journey is >8hrs, there is evidence to suggest that you may be at an increased risk of developing a DVT.

A DVT (deep vein thrombosis) is a blood clot which forms in your leg, calf or pelvis. When you are pregnant and for up to 6 weeks after the birth of your baby you have a higher risk of developing a DVT. The effects of sitting still for long periods of time in sometimes-cramped conditions can increase the risk of DVT further.

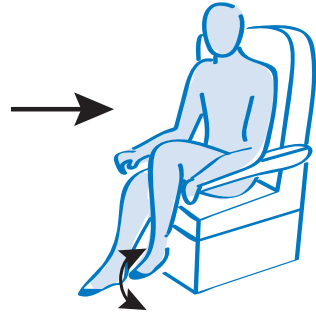
To minimize the risk of a DVT you should;

1. Wear graduated elastic compression stockings (these can be available from your doctor or local pharmacy).
2. Try to get an aisle seat and take regular walks around the plane every 30 minutes.
3. Drink plenty of water throughout the flight.

4. Do not take sleeping tablets, which cause immobility.
5. Try a few simple exercises to keep your legs moving, for example;

1. Ankle Circles

Lift feet off the floor.
Draw a circle with the toes, simultaneously moving one foot clockwise and the other foot counter clockwise for 15 seconds.



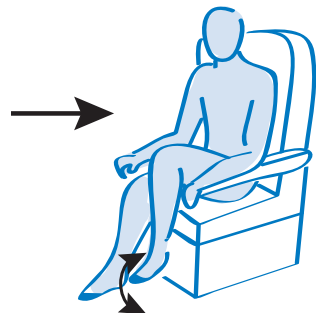
2. Foot Pumps

Foot motion is in three stages

1. Start with both heels on the floor and point feet upward as high as you can.
2. Put both feet flat on the floor.
3. Lift heels high, keeping balls of feet on the floor. Repeat these 3 stages in a continuous motion.

3. Knee Lifts

Lift leg with knee bent while contracting your thigh muscle. Alternate legs. Repeat 2 to 30 times for each leg.



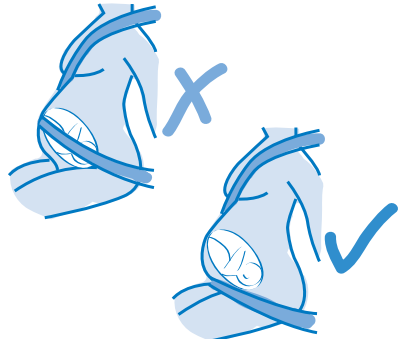
Whatever the length of the flight if you have additional risk factors for DVT you should consult your doctor.

Are long car trips safe during pregnancy?

There is no reason not to travel by car when you are pregnant, but you will need plenty of stops for the toilet and to stretch your legs. As with plane journeys the effects of sitting for long periods of time can increase your risk of DVT further and therefore follow the steps to minimize this risk.

Should I wear a seat belt now I'm pregnant?

- You should ALWAYS wear a seat belt when you are travelling in a car.
- Wear the lap portion so that it fits across your thighs and hips and under your bump. The diagonal shoulder portion of the belt should sit over your collarbone and between your breasts.
- As your pregnancy progresses past 12 wks, you may find it more comfortable and safer to use a **maternity seatbelt**.



Useful Tips

- Follow guidance to minimize your risk of DVT.
- Wear loose clothing and comfortable shoes.
- Adjust your seatbelt so the strap lies below your bump.

Your destination

- What are the medical facilities at your destination in case of any complications?
- Do you have all your immunisations and recommended medication for the country you are travelling to?
- Does your travel insurance cover pregnancy and care for your baby if you give birth unexpectedly.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Will the changes in the atmosphere inside the plane have a harmful effect on the baby?

A: If you have a straightforward pregnancy there is no evidence that the change in air pressure will have a harmful effect on your baby.

Q: Will flying cause you to go into early labour and cause their waters to break?

A: Any pregnant woman (even if uncomplicated) has a small chance of going into labour early or their waters breaking early. However, there is no evidence that flying causes this.

Q: Is my chance of miscarriage increased if I fly?

A: There is no evidence that flying increases your risk of miscarriage.

Q: Can the increased amount of radiation levels cause harm to the baby?

A: Background cosmic radiation levels are higher at altitude, however occasional flights are not considered to present significant risk to your baby.

Q: Can I wear a seatbelt?

A: You **MUST** wear a seatbelt. You should ensure the strap of your seatbelt is reasonably tightly fastened under your tummy and across the top of you thighs.

If you decide to fly, always discuss your travel plans with a doctor/midwife and remember to take your handheld pregnancy notes with you.

If you decide to fly, always discuss your travel plans with a doctor/midwife and remember to take your handheld pregnancy notes with you.

Looking after and sharing Inforamtion about you

We have updated our Privacy Notices in line with the data protection legislation (General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)/Data Protection Act 2018. For more information about how we use your personal data please visit our website at:

<https://bwc.nhs.uk/privacy-policy>

Birmingham Women's Hospital
Mindelsohn Way
Birmingham B15 2TG
Website: www.bwc.nhs.uk

Authors: Miss M. Shehmar and Laura Paton
Reviewed by: Mr Hassan and Tracey Steadman
Produced: February 2019
Review Date: February 2022
Version 1.0
Ref: 0203



By your side