



SELF HELP

## Travelling: advice and tips

**There is always a slight risk of a Deep Vein Thrombosis (DVT) for Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome patients when sitting immobile for long periods of time, so it is important to move around as much as possible. Air travel should be quite safe if you take the following points into consideration before flying.**

### **If you are treated with 75mg aspirin daily**

If you are treated with aspirin alone, 75-150mg should be sufficient for a short-haul flight less than six hours. If the flight lasts longer than six hours especially overnight, you should discuss with your doctor whether an injection of heparin before the flight, in addition to your aspirin is worth considering. This may be appropriate for patients who have cardiovascular risks such as being overweight, smoking, diabetes, high cholesterol or high blood pressure.

Many Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome patients who have already suffered a less severe clotting event such as a TIA or DVT, are often treated with 75-150mg aspirin daily. In these cases, it is recommended that you take an injection of heparin before the flight as well as your aspirin, regardless of the duration of the flight.

### **If you need to inject with heparin**

Heparin is not always stocked by smaller pharmacies and surgeries, so you should make an appointment with your GP a few weeks before your flight so there is plenty of time to process the prescription. You should also ask your doctor to write a letter stating why you need to take heparin as you may need to explain why you are carrying needles when you fly.

On the day of the flight you must ensure you are carrying a copy of your prescription and the letter from your doctor. It is best to carry all the heparin syringes you need on your person in case your hold luggage goes astray; in the UK it is necessary to put them in a clear plastic bag due to the current restrictions on liquids allowed in hand baggage.

You should take the injection as close to the time the flight leaves as possible. This is because heparin has an instantaneous effect, but only lasts for twelve hours. If you have a twenty-four hour flight, you will need to inject for a second time after twelve hours.

Although all airports usually have a clinic where you can pay the medical team to administer the injection, it is simpler and more cost effective to do it yourself. Please read our Fact Sheet: How to inject with heparin.

### **If you are taking warfarin**

Patients who are being treated with warfarin are believed to be the safest on the plane in terms of risk of developing a DVT. However, it has been found that the ascent to altitude can adversely affect your INR and cause it to become lower than usual, so it is recommended that you take heparin syringes with you so you can inject yourself if your INR becomes too low after a flight.

If you do not self-test and have regular INR blood tests at an anticoagulation clinic, you should get your INR checked before you travel, take your yellow anticoagulation therapy booklet and an adequate supply of warfarin tablets. You should also let the clinic know how long you will be away. It is recommended that you have your INR tested after the outward flight and before the return flight home to ensure you are within your range; therefore, you will have to research the availability and location of anticoagulation clinics at your destination. »

## TRAVELLING: ADVICE AND TIPS

If you already self-test and manage your own medication, the same advice applies in that you should take heparin injections with you in case your INR drops too low, take your yellow anticoagulation therapy booklet and an adequate supply of warfarin tablets. The monitor needs to be carried in your hand luggage and make sure you have enough testing strips with you. Take an INR reading before you fly and check again after the outward flight, then again before the return journey.

Travelling check list for patients on warfarin:

- Research the hospitals/clinics in the areas you intend to travel to.
- Make sure you have your up-to-date yellow anticoagulation book, prescription/letter for the heparin injections and insurance policy.
- Carry information about Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome with you.
- Buy a digital watch or set your mobile phone so you set an alarm to take your warfarin tablets at the correct intervals.
- Be aware of any changes in diet and drinks while you are away, as these can also affect your INR.

### If you are pregnant

If you have Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome and are pregnant, flying is considered safe as it is highly likely that you will be taking 75mg aspirin daily as well as heparin injections. The same guidelines apply as to all passengers taking heparin, but you should be aware that most airlines will only be prepared to carry you up to your 27th week of the pregnancy.

### When you are on the plane

- Wear loose, comfortable clothes.
- Consider buying flight socks (compression stockings) as research has shown they can reduce the risk of DVT and leg swelling during flights of four hours and more. However, they must be the right size and worn correctly.
- Store luggage overhead so you have room to stretch out your legs.
- Do anti-DVT exercises. Raise your heels, keeping your toes on the floor, and then bring them down. Do this ten times. Now raise and lower your toes ten times. Do it at least every half an hour or more often if you like.
- Walk around whenever you can, but at least every couple of hours.
- Drink plenty of water – this helps accelerate the blood flow.
- Do not drink too much alcohol as this can cause dehydration and immobility.
- Do not take sleeping tablets as these will cause immobility.

### Travel insurance

In the past, it was very difficult to find travel insurance for anyone with Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome even if the patient had minor events and was very stable. However, after our charity contacted the Association of British Insurers in 2011, there appears to have been a breakthrough and now a variety of different travel insurance companies are offering insurance to people with antiphospholipid antibodies.

We have compiled a list of travel insurance companies who will insure APS that can be viewed and printed from the Travel Advice section on our website.

The price of the premium will still cost more than usual, but should not be too high. As Hughes/antiphospholipid syndrome can affect people in such a variety of different ways, each travel insurance policy will look at the individual case. If you have recent or multiple clotting events, you may find it difficult to find anyone to insure you, so we recommend that you use a company which specialises in pre-existing medical conditions.