

Computer Users at Increased Risk for Clots

LONDON (Reuters Health) -Sitting in front of the computer for hours on end could increase the risk for the type of blood clots that cause "economy class syndrome" in long-haul airplane passengers, researchers said on Tuesday.

A team of New Zealand-based doctors diagnosed a life-threatening case of this type of clot in a 32 year-old man who regularly spent up to 12 hours a day using his computer, often going hours without standing up.

The man had no other risk factors for the condition, known as venous thromboembolism, in which blood clots that form in immobile limbs travel to the lungs. So Dr. Richard Beasley, from the Medical Research Institute of New Zealand, et al. dubbed it "e-Thrombosis".

"In view of the widespread use of computers in relation to work, recreation and personal communication, the potential burden of e-Thrombosis may be considerable," they write in the European Respiratory Journal.

"It may be similar to the situation with the risk of blood clots with long distance air travel—it was not until there was publicity with individual cases that the real extent of the problem was recognized," Beasley said.

The patient originally developed painful swelling in his calf, which cleared up after 10 days, according to the report. For the next four weeks he had increased trouble breathing, which culminated in him losing consciousness and being admitted to the hospital.

He recovered after treatment with the blood-thinning drugs heparin and warfarin.

"With the current state of knowledge it would seem prudent to advise all individuals who commonly sit for prolonged periods at a computer to undertake frequent leg and foot exercises and to take regular breaks for mobilization away from the computer," the study authors suggest.

Dr. John Scurr, a vascular surgeon and thrombosis expert from University College and Middlesex Hospitals in London, said he had treated several people with similar experiences.

"This is something that I think we're going to see more of," he told Reuters Health. "I think one must say that this is going to be relatively rare, but potentially something that might happen if you do sit still."

"It's very common for people sitting still for a few hours to get little tiny clots, and when they walk they disappear," Scurr said. "But if they then sit there for long periods of time you can see how the clot might grow and the leg might swell, and how a bit (of the clot) might break off and go to the lung."

For most fit, young people, sitting at a desk would probably not be enough to trigger a dangerous blood clot, Scurr said.

"But if you add to that other risk factors, like somebody who perhaps in the past broke their leg, or somebody with some sort of co-existing illness, then you get to a point where you might develop a serious blood clot."

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