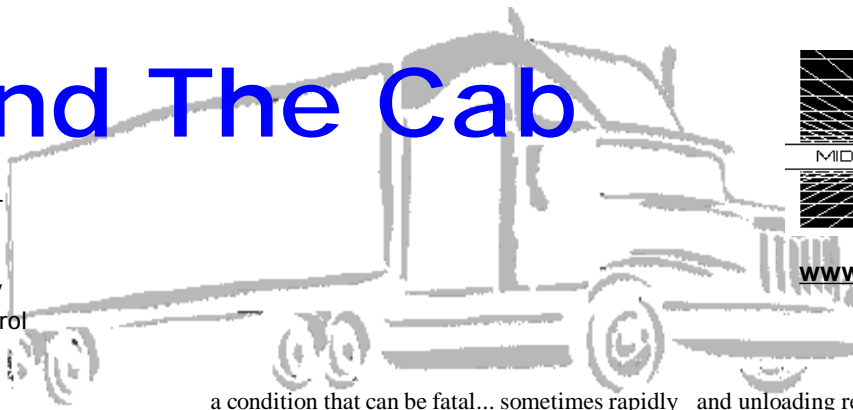


# Beyond The Cab

The only safety management newsletter dedicated exclusively to addressing injury prevention and workers' compensation cost control for trucking companies.



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## Can Simply Sitting Behind the Wheel Can be a Hazard?

The safety director of medium-sized trucking company noticed one of his drivers limping a little. Out of concern he approach the driver and asked, "Tom, did you hurt your leg?" Tom replied, "I think I pulled a muscle in my leg." He didn't recall a specific incident that caused the injury, but his leg hurt nonetheless. When questioned further, Tom said that the pain is worse when he walks or stands, but eases-up when he props-up his leg. He was certain that it was a pulled muscle because of the way it felt. Besides, it's easy to understand how a driver could pull a muscle from climbing in and out of the cab and the trailer several times a day. Tom didn't want to see a doctor. He gets too little time with his family as it is, and wants to spend his non-driving time at home. However, several days later the safety director saw Tom again... still limping. "Your leg still hurts huh Tom?" he asked. Tom replied, "Yes, but more than before, and now its a little red and swollen."

What Tom could be experiencing is a condition called "Deep Vein Thrombosis" (DVT). That may sound like a pretty intimidating condition, as it should. DVT cannot only be debilitating, it can be fatal.

### What is DVT?

Short and sweet, a "thrombus" is a blood clot. When it forms in the deep-lying veins of the leg, it's called a deep vein thrombus. But a thrombus is a special kind of blood clot. When it forms in a vein, it blocks the circulation. However, that's only part of the danger. If the blood clot breaks loose and travels to the lungs, brain, heart or other organ, it can become lodged there. Once lodged in the organ, the clot can create an embolism (a sudden blockage of an artery). This prevents proper circulation of blood to the organ and can quickly result in serious tissue damage or the death of the organ tissue.

If the blood clot lodges in the brain it can produce a stroke. If it lodges in a lung and blocks a pulmonary artery, it can obstruct the circulation and can result in death of the tissue,

a condition that can be fatal... sometimes rapidly fatal. Obviously, if the blood clot lodges in the heart it can cause a serious heart attack that could also prove fatal.

### What Causes DVT?

Under normal circumstances blood doesn't form a clot in the vein. However, a clot can form when the blood that moves through the deep-lying veins in of the legs travels more slowly than normal. This is why long hours of sitting and prolonged bed rest increase the potential for DVT. It can also occur when some other factor makes the blood more likely to clot. These include a direct injury to the vein, oral birth control pills, a recent surgery, a recent pregnancy, or the presence of some types of cancers.

### Is DVT a Trucking Industry Issue?

Is DVT a medical condition with which trucking industry professionals should be concerned? Consider the following questions to answer that question.

- § Do you know of a driver who sits for extended periods of time?
- § Do you know of a driver that is overweight?
- § Do you know of a driver that smokes cigarettes?
- § Do you know of a driver that eats fatty foods?
- § Do you know of a driver over the age of 40?
- § Do you know of a driver who drinks alcohol (while off duty of course)?

Perhaps an easier question would be, "Do you know of a driver who doesn't fall into at least some of those categories?"

### Extended Sitting

In an effort to attract and maintain professional drivers many trucking companies are providing trucks that are more plush and comfortable than ever before. Additionally, more and more trucking companies have eliminated the loading

and unloading responsibilities of the driver, to the point that the sole duty of a driver is "driving." You will be hard-pressed to find a driver complain about either of these two industry shifts. However, particularly for long-haul drivers, this translates into sitting for quite extensive periods of time, which may be 8 to 10 hours per day.

So significant is the risk factor associated with sitting for extended periods of time, that the airline industry is embattled in lawsuits from airline passengers who have developed DVT (presumably from sitting in the cramped economy class seats for extended flights). This phenomenon has therefore been dubbed "economy class syndrome." However, at least one medical professional has been published dubbing this phenomenon among truck drivers as "highway syndrome."

### Other Risk Factors

Although sitting for extended periods of time is being cited as a major risk factor in the onset of DVT, it's not the only risk factor that should concern long-haul trucking companies. The use of oral contraceptives has long been known to increase the potential for blood clotting and should be a concern as more and more females enter the industry. Additionally, varicose veins, certain cancers, and recent surgeries increase the risk of developing DVT.

### An Ounce of Prevention

Luckily, the precautions that can be taken to help prevent DVT are relatively easy and inexpensive.

- § Drink plenty of water or juice
- § Get up out of your seat and stretch your legs at least once per hour. (Nature may cause this to occur automatically, if the driver adheres to the first recommendation)
- § Exercise while seated. (Stretch your legs. Flex and extend your ankles. Tighten and release your buttocks.)
- § If a driver has had problems with blood clots in the past or has increase risk factors for the onset of DVT, encourage them to wear elastic support hose. (May require a prescription)