

## Phlebitis: In Some Cases, It Is Serious

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Phlebitis, the condition from which President Nixon has been suffering in recent weeks, is regarded in medical circles as common and not serious if treated properly. Nevertheless, phlebitis or inflammation of a vein, can lead to sudden and even fatal complications in some people.

Doctors attending Mr. Nixon on his flight to Brussels yesterday insisted that the President's case was "mild" and that there was "no danger" of a blood clot's traveling from the inflamed vein in his leg to his lung.

Yet the President's doctors said they had feared such a complication in recent days.

The medical statements made yesterday showed obvious signs that President Nixon is a difficult patient to treat.

### Doctors Not Told

Though his symptoms first began before his trip to the Middle East two weeks ago, Mr. Nixon did not tell his doctors that his left leg was swollen. As a result, medical treatment was delayed. This can aggravate phlebitis.

Physicians not involved in Mr. Nixon's case were critical of the President's decision to go abroad while suffering from an active case of phlebitis. These doctors said in interviews that flying was not advisable for pa-

### But Doctors Say the Condition Is Common and Generally Without Complications

tients during or just after an attack of phlebitis.

"It is not a good idea for him to fly with phlebitis," a leading specialist in internal medicine said on the basis of general medical principles. The internist, along with surgeons and other doctors interviewed, asked that his name not be used for publication.

A New York doctor said that for legal reasons he would make any patient who decided to fly when suffering phlebitis sign a statement that he was doing so "against medical advice."

### Leg a Common Site

Phlebitis, which is derived from Greek words for inflammation of a vein, can occur anywhere in the body. The legs are the most common site because when people sit for long uninterrupted periods with their knees bent blood tends to pool. In such circumstances, a clot often forms in a leg vein, and through a mechanism that doctors do not precisely understand an inflammatory reaction develops in the vein. The condition than is called thrombophlebitis.

The seriousness of the condition depends on whether the vein is superficial or deep. Superficial thrombophlebitis generally does not threaten life. But if the clot is in the deep vein—beneath the muscles in the leg—a piece can break off, float with the venous blood returning to the heart and lodge in the lungs as pulmonary embolus.

Depending on the size of the embolous clot, it can kill suddenly or destroy a portion of the lung, causing, among other symptoms, sudden shortness of breath and sharp chest pains. A small embolus may produce no symptoms.

Except in the most unusual circumstances, clots in the leg do not go to the brain.

It is not known whether President Nixon's phlebitis is in a superficial or a deep vein.

### Customary Treatment

Customary treatment for active cases of phlebitis includes bed rest, propping a leg on a pillow, and injections of anticoagulant and other drugs.

President's Nixon's leg was elevated aboard Air Force One on his trans-Atlantic flight yesterday. His doctors said he was receiving hot packs to reduce the swelling but no medications. It is not known whether the President refused such treatment or if his physicians offered it.

Of greater concern to the physicians interviewed was whether such modern diagnostic methods as the Doppler technique had been used to measure the blood flow in the President's legs. The Doppler technique is often used in cases similar to the President's to determine if clots have obstructed a vein beneath the muscles.