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## MEDWATCH

Pine bark extract is pricey, but worth trying if you can't afford first class

- **Product:** Pycnogenol (French maritime pine bark extract), \$44 for 60 capsules, 50 mg; or \$63 for 40 capsules, 100 mg.

- **Key ingredients:** Pycnogenol is a natural plant extract from the bark of the maritime pine that grows along the coast of southwest France. It contains pro-cyanidins, bioflavonoids and organic acids.

- **The pitch:** Enhances circulation and prevents leg/ankle swelling and DVT, deep vein thrombosis, a problem referred to as "economy class syndrome" during cramped, long airline flights of seven to 12 hours.

- **How it works:** Strengthens vein walls so they can better resist increased pressure, letting less liquid seep into the tissue and preventing swelling.

- **Pros:** A study published last year



in Clinical and Applied Thrombosis/Hemostasis found that French maritime pine bark extract prevented thrombosis in legs and reduced swelling of ankles and feet among airline passengers. Another study published last year in

Angiology found that the extract sped healing of venous ulcers. Italian researchers found similar results related to reduced leg swelling in two separate studies in 2000. No negative side effects have been reported.

- **Cons:** No conclusive results; more research is needed. The extract is expensive and there is no agreement over how much of it is needed over what length of time to fight DVT.

- **Bottom line:** If you've tried the routine advice for travelers (compression stockings, aspirin, no alcohol or salty food and frequent standing and stretching) without success then it's worth a try. It may be pricey, but it's cheaper than business class.

-JODI MAILANDER FARRELL