

VARICOSE VEINS



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Veins, usually in the legs, which become permanently enlarged and often twisted. Varicose veins can involve superficial veins, deep veins, and veins that connect superficial and deep veins. The disorder is more common in adults.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Enlarged, bulging, ropelike, bluish veins that are visible under the skin. They appear most often in the back of the calf or on the inside of the leg from the ankle to the groin.
- Vague discomfort and aching, or pain in the legs, especially after standing.
- Fatigue.

CAUSES

The veins of the legs contain one-way valves every few inches to help blood return against gravity to the heart. If the valves leak, blood pressure in the veins prevents blood from draining properly. Valves may fail because of previous vein disease, such as thrombophlebitis; prolonged standing; or pressure on veins in the pelvis from pregnancy, tumors, or fluid in the abdomen.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Increasing age.
- Being overweight.
- Straining. This may be from constipation, a chronic cough, prostate problems, or urinary retention.
- Family history of varicose veins.
- Work that require, prolonged sitting or standing.
- Pregnancy or menstruation.
- Injury or prior surgery on the legs.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Exercise regularly, especially by walking, swimming, or bicycling to keep circulation healthy.
- Don't sit or stand for long periods. Move around.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Self-care steps may help symptoms. Medical treatment has a high success rate.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Ulcer near the ankle (stasis dermatitis) caused by poor blood flow to the skin. This may be slow to heal.
- Deep-vein blood clot.
- Venous insufficiency. Blood does not completely return to the heart.
- Varicose veins may return after treatment.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Your health care provider will do a physical exam of the affected veins and ask about your symptoms. Medical tests may include ultrasound and other studies.
- Simple treatment methods may be recommended:
 - Take frequent rest periods with legs elevated.
 - Use lightweight, elastic compression hosiery. It is best to put them on before getting out of bed.
 - Don't wear girdles or other tight clothing.
 - Avoid long periods of sitting or standing. Take breaks and walk around.
 - Wear comfortable shoes and avoid high heels.
 - Cross legs at ankles and not at the knees.
- Surgery and other treatment methods may be done for pain, recurrent phlebitis (inflamed veins), skin changes, or for cosmetic reasons.
- Veins can be sealed off by using sclerotherapy (injections), laser, intense-pulsed light therapy, or radio-frequency ablation. Veins can also be removed with surgery. Your health care provider will discuss your options, the risks, and benefits of each one with you.
- Spider veins (idiopathic telangiectases) are small superficial veins. They may be treated with a laser or with injections.

MEDICATIONS

- A chemical may be injected (sclerotherapy) into small varicose veins to make them collapse and disappear over time. Other veins will take over blood flow.
- Drugs for pain may be prescribed following surgery.

ACTIVITY

- Walking and being active after any treatment is important to help promote healing.
- Compression hose will usually need to be worn for a period of time after any form of treatment.

DIET

- Eat healthy. Avoid alcohol.
- Consider a weight-loss diet, if weight is a problem.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has varicose veins.
- After diagnosis, varicose veins cause any problems.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page