

# Varicose Veins

## What is a varicose vein?

Swollen, blue, bulging, twisted, superficial (those closest to the skin) veins of the leg are known as varicose veins.

## What causes varicose veins?

High pressure inside the superficial veins of the leg cause varicose veins. Genetics are thought to play a large role in contributing to varicose veins.

## What are the effects of varicose veins?

Left untreated, varicose veins may become worse. Persons with varicose veins often experience leg aches and fatigue. Skin changes may include rashes, redness, and sores.

## How common are varicose veins?

As many as 40 million Americans have varicose veins.

## What factors influence development of varicose veins?

Age is a factor. People between the ages of 30 and 70 often have varicose veins.

During pregnancy, 50 to 55 percent of American women experience varicose veins. In most cases, the veins return to normal within a year after childbirth. Women who have multiple pregnancies may develop permanent varicose veins.

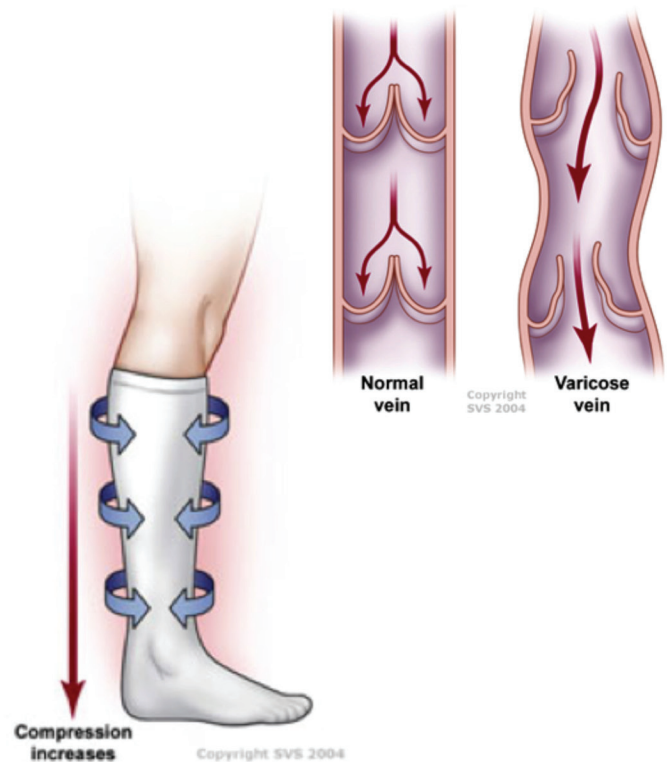
The varicose vein risk factors for women and men include:

- a family history of varicose veins,
- being overweight,
- standing or sitting for long periods of time,
- having a deep vein thrombosis (DVT).

## Are diagnostic tests available for varicose veins?

Yes. After obtaining a medical history and completing a physical exam, physicians examine prominent veins. Then, physicians may apply a tourniquet or direct hand pressure to observe how the veins fill with blood.

To identify the causes of varicose veins, physicians may order a duplex ultrasound test. The painless test uses high-frequency waves to measure the speed of blood flow. The test helps visualize the vein structure and the blood flow in the veins. The test can take approximately 10-20 minutes per leg.



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### What are the initial treatment options for varicose veins?

Most doctors will suggest lifestyle changes for patients with varicose veins. This includes:

- maintaining the proper weight,
- elevating legs when resting,
- not sitting or standing for long periods of time,
- wearing compression (elastic support) stockings.

This is the mainstay of treatment.

### Additional treatments for varicose veins

**Sclerotherapy** is the sealing of the veins via an injection of a medication. This procedure is done mainly for smaller spider veins. It is performed in a doctor's office. The physician injects a chemical into the varicose veins to prevent the veins from filling with blood.

**Vein Stripping** is performed for more involved varicose veins. The physician may make two small incisions: one in the groin area and another below the knee. Next, the physician removes the diseased veins.

In a similar procedure known as **Transilluminated Powered Phlebectomy or TIPP**, the physician shines an intense light on the leg to see the veins. Once the physician locates the varicose vein, he or she passes a suction device through a tiny incision and suctions out the vein. The procedure is relatively painless.

**Ablation and laser treatment** are performed on patients with severe varicose veins. The ablation procedure inserts a catheter, a thin, flexible tube into the leg vein. The tip of the catheter has tiny electrodes that heat and seal off the walls of the vein. Similarly, laser treatments use a tiny fiber placed in the vein through a catheter. The fiber sends out laser energy that closes the diseased portion of the vein.

These two modes of treatment frequently replace stripping of the saphenous vein as described above. These procedures can be performed alone or in conjunction with removal of individual clusters of varicose veins known as small incision avulsion or ambulatory phlebectomy.

Vascular surgeons are the only physicians treating vascular disease today who can perform all treatment options available including: medical management; minimally invasive endovascular procedures including balloon angioplasty, and stent ablation of the veins procedures; and open surgical repair including bypass and stripping.



Only when you see a vascular surgeon who offers all treatment modalities will you be assured of receiving the care that is most appropriate to your condition.

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