

Help for people with varicose veins

By Robert Silk

This summer, many women and men will gaze in the mirror, asking themselves, “pants or shorts?” Yet when looking down, some may be reminded of their unpleasant varicose veins.

If you suffer from varicose veins – bulging, throbbing, aching veins – you are not alone. An estimated 25 million people in the United States suffer from a disorder called superficial venous reflux, or varicose veins.

What causes varicose veins?

Venous insufficiency is a common condition that forms when blood flow decreases from the leg veins up to the heart. This causes a pooling of blood in the veins. Normally, one-way valves in veins keep blood flowing toward the heart – against the force of gravity. When the valves do not perform their function, blood can flow backwards or reflux. The excess blood within the veins results in visible varicose veins at the skin surface.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of varicose veins may include aching, throbbing, fatigue and heaviness. Symptoms may worsen as the day goes on. People with venous insufficiency can have symptoms without visible varicose veins.

Can varicose veins be treated?

Varicose vein treatment can reduce symptoms and prevent complications. Home treatment, including exercising, wearing compression stockings, and elevating the legs, is the first and often best approach.

If home treatment does not help, minimally invasive treatment options are available at Barton Memorial Hospital. These include sclerotherapy or endovenous laser ablation.

An interventional radiologist, a doctor trained in the diagnosis and minimally invasive treatment of venous disorders, can diagnose and determine the best treatment. The assessment includes health history, a physical examination and in many cases, an ultrasound examination of your venous system.

Endovenous ablation is a minimally invasive outpatient treatment for venous insufficiency that is performed using an ultrasound. After applying local anesthetic to the skin over the vein, an interventional radiologist inserts a thin tube known as a catheter, about the size of a strand of spaghetti, into the abnormal leg vein. Through this catheter, laser is applied inside the vein and seals it closed.

Sclerotherapy, ideal for small veins, is a procedure where a chemical (sclerosant) is injected into a varicose vein to damage and scar the inside lining of the vein, causing the vein to close. Many insurances cover venous insufficiency treatments based on medical necessity.

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