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## Are vein problems harming your legs?

Have you noticed pain or swelling in your legs? Do your symptoms worsen when you're sitting or standing in one position? If so, you may have damaged veins, which can affect the way your legs look and feel. Some vein problems are cosmetic. But others are a health threat, damaging tissue or even causing blood clots.

## Common types of vein problems:

### Varicose veins

Varicose veins are enlarged veins that are visible through the skin and may appear as blue or purple twisted, knot-like cords. Varicose veins can occur anywhere in the body, but are more commonly found on the legs.

### What causes varicose veins?

Varicose veins are caused by increased blood pressure inside the superficial leg veins. Two main types of veins are present in the legs. Superficial veins are near the surface of the skin, whereas deep veins are located in the muscle tissue. Varicose veins occur in the superficial veins in the legs. In contrast, deep veins lead to the vena cava, a large vein that transports blood to the heart.

### What are the symptoms of varicose veins?

The following are the most common symptoms of varicose veins. However, each individual may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include: color changes in the skin, sores on the legs rash, sensations in the legs, such as a heavy feeling, or burning, and/or aching.

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

#### Non-surgical methods include:

- elevation of the legs
- compression stockings
- **sclerotherapy:** this procedure involves a saline or chemical solution that is injected into the varicose veins that causes them to harden so that they no longer fill with blood.
- laser treatment
- **ablation:** involves the insertion of a thin, flexible tube called a catheter inserted into a varicose vein. The tip of the catheter heats the walls of the varicose vein and destroys the vein tissue. Once destroyed, the vein is no longer able to carry blood and is absorbed by your body.

Surgical approaches to the treatment of varicose veins include:

- **vein stripping:** this procedure involves tying off all varicose veins associated with the leg's main superficial vein and removing it from the leg.
- **small incision avulsion:** this procedure involves passing hooks through small incisions, and may be done alone or together with vein stripping.
- **transilluminated powered phlebectomy:** a device is passed through a tiny incision and removes the vein with suction.

## How are vein problems diagnosed?

1. Health history and physical exam
2. Duplex ultrasound – a non-invasive imaging test. It uses sound waves to create pictures of vein structures and blood flow. This makes it possible to locate the source of a vein problem. You may be asked to stand and to lie down during different parts of the test.

## Steps you can take to reduce your risk:

1. Compression stockings: these elastic stockings squeeze or compress the veins and prevent blood from flowing backward. In addition, compression stockings may help with healing of skin sores and prevention of additional sores. Compression stockings are effective in treating varicose veins if worn daily and may prevent the need for more invasive treatment.
2. Exercise to improve blood flow to the legs.
3. Elevate your legs to reduce swelling.
4. When sitting or standing for a long period of time, do leg or foot exercises to improve blood flow.
5. Keep your skin moist to help prevent dryness and itching.
6. Maintain a healthy weight and diet.

Varicose veins, because they occur in superficial veins, are not generally linked to a serious condition called deep vein thrombosis (DVT). However, with severe varicose veins, there is a small increased chance of developing DVT. DVT requires immediate medical attention. Symptoms of DVT include sudden, severe leg swelling and can result in blood clots that travel to the brain or the



# Your Guide To: Varicose Veins

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heart.

If you'd like to learn more about DVT, please request a brochure or contact your health care provider.