

ECHO-GUIDED SCLEROTHERAPY FOR VARICOSE VEINS

VARICOSE VEINS

DEFINITION: Varicose veins are gnarled, enlarged veins. Any vein may become varicose, but the veins most commonly affected are those in your legs and feet. That's because standing and walking upright increases the pressure in the veins of your lower body. Spider veins are similar to varicose veins, but they're smaller. Spider veins are found closer to the skin's surface and are often red or blue. They occur on the legs, but can also be found on the face. Spider veins vary in size and often look like a spider's web.

Signs you may have varicose veins include:

- Veins that are dark purple or blue in color
- Veins that appear twisted and bulging; often like cords on your legs

When painful signs and symptoms occur, they may include:

- An achy or heavy feeling in your legs
- Burning, throbbing, muscle cramping and swelling in your lower legs
- Worsened pain after sitting or standing for a long time
- Itching around one or more of your veins
- Skin ulcers near your ankle, which can mean you have a serious form of vascular disease that requires medical attention.

CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS:

- **Age.** The risk of varicose veins increases with age. Aging causes wear and tear on the valves in your veins that help regulate blood flow. Eventually, that wear causes the valves to allow blood to flow back into your veins where it collects instead of flowing up to your heart.
- **Sex.** Women are more likely to develop the condition. Hormonal changes during pregnancy, premenstruation or menopause may be a factor. Female hormones tend to relax vein walls. Taking hormone replacement therapy or birth control pills may increase your risk of varicose veins.
- **Family history.** If other family members had varicose veins, there's a greater chance you will too.
- **Obesity.** Being overweight puts added pressure on your veins.
- **Standing or sitting for long periods of time.** Your blood doesn't flow as well if you're in the same position for long periods.

COMPLICATIONS:

- **Ulcers.** Extremely painful ulcers may form on the skin near varicose veins, particularly near the ankles. Ulcers are caused by long-term fluid buildup in these tissues, caused by increased pressure of blood within affected veins. A discolored spot on the skin usually begins before an ulcer forms. See your doctor immediately if you suspect you've developed an ulcer.
- **Blood clots.** Occasionally, veins deep within the legs become enlarged. In such cases, the affected leg may swell considerably. Any sudden leg swelling warrants urgent medical attention because it may indicate a blood clot — a condition known medically as thrombophlebitis.

DIAGNOSIS:

To diagnose varicose veins, your doctor will do a physical exam, including looking at your legs while you're standing to check for swelling.

You may also need an ultrasound test to see if the valves in your veins are functioning normally or if there's any evidence of a blood clot. In this noninvasive test, you lie on an examination table or in the same standing position. A small amount of warm gel is applied to your skin. During an ultrasound, the doctor presses a small hand-held device (transducer), about the size of a bar of soap, against your skin over the area of your body being examined, moving from one area to another as necessary. The transducer transmits images of the veins in your legs to a monitor, so your doctor can see them.

TREATMENT AND PREVENTION:

Fortunately, treatment usually doesn't mean a hospital stay or a long, uncomfortable recovery. Thanks to less invasive procedures, varicose veins can generally be treated on an outpatient basis.

Self-care — such as exercising, losing weight, not wearing tight clothes, elevating your legs, and avoiding long periods of standing or sitting — can ease pain and prevent varicose veins from getting worse.

Wearing compression stockings is often the first approach to try before moving on to other treatments. Compression stockings are worn all day. They steadily squeeze your legs, helping veins and leg muscles move blood more efficiently. The amount of compression varies by type and brand.

If you don't respond to self-care, compression stockings, or if your condition is more severe, your doctor may suggest one of these varicose vein treatments: FLEBOSCLEROSIS (ECHO-GUIDED SCLEROTHERAPY). CATHETER BASED THERAPIES. SURGERY.