

Varicose Veins: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

Varicose veins are twisted, enlarged veins near the surface of the skin. They develop most often in the legs and ankles.

Some people may be more likely than others to get varicose veins because of aging or hormone changes or because a parent has them. Being overweight or pregnant can make varicose veins worse. Jobs that require standing for long periods of time also can make them worse.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Wear compression stockings during the day to help relieve symptoms. They improve blood flow and are the main treatment for varicose veins. Talk to your doctor about which ones to get and where to get them.
- Prop up your legs at or above the level of your heart when possible. This helps keep the blood from pooling in your lower legs and improves blood flow to the rest of your body.
- Avoid sitting and standing for long periods. This puts added stress on your veins.
- Get regular exercise, and control your weight. Walk, bicycle, or swim to improve blood flow in your legs.
- If you bump your leg so hard that you know it is likely to bruise, prop up your leg and put ice or a cold pack on the area for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Try to do this every 1 to 2 hours for the next 3 days (when you are awake) or until the swelling goes down. Put a thin cloth between the ice and your skin.
- If you cut or scratch the skin over a vein, it may bleed a lot. Prop up your leg and apply firm pressure with a clean bandage over the site of the bleeding. Continue to apply pressure for a full 15 minutes. Do not check sooner to see if the bleeding has stopped. If the bleeding has not stopped after 15 minutes, apply pressure again for another 15 minutes. You can repeat this up to 3 times for a total of 45 minutes.

If you have a blood clot in a varicose vein, you may have tenderness and swelling over the vein. The vein may feel firm. Be sure to call your doctor right away if you have these symptoms. If your doctor has told you how to care for the clot, follow his or her instructions. Care may include the following:

- Prop up your leg and apply heat with a warm, damp cloth or a heating pad set on low (put a towel or cloth between your leg and the heating pad to prevent burns).
- Ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter pain medicine, such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin), or naproxen (Aleve). Be safe with medicines. Read and follow all instructions on the label.

When should you call for help?

Call 911 anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You have sudden chest pain and shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have signs of a blood clot, such as:
 - Pain in your calf, back of the knee, thigh, or groin.
 - Redness and swelling in your leg or groin.
- A varicose vein begins to bleed and you cannot stop it.
- You have a tender lump in your leg.
- You get an open sore.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- Your varicose vein symptoms do not improve with home treatment.

Where can you learn more?

Go to <http://www.healthwise.net/ed>

Enter **B637** in the search box to learn more about "**Varicose Veins: Care Instructions.**"

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