



# Varicose veins

Varicose veins may occur in almost any part of the body. They are most often seen in the back of the calf or on the inside of the leg between the groin and the ankle.

## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

- Swollen and twisted veins look blue and are close to the surface of the skin.
- Veins bulge and feel heavy.
- The legs and feet can swell.
- The skin can itch.



## CAUSES & RISK FACTORS

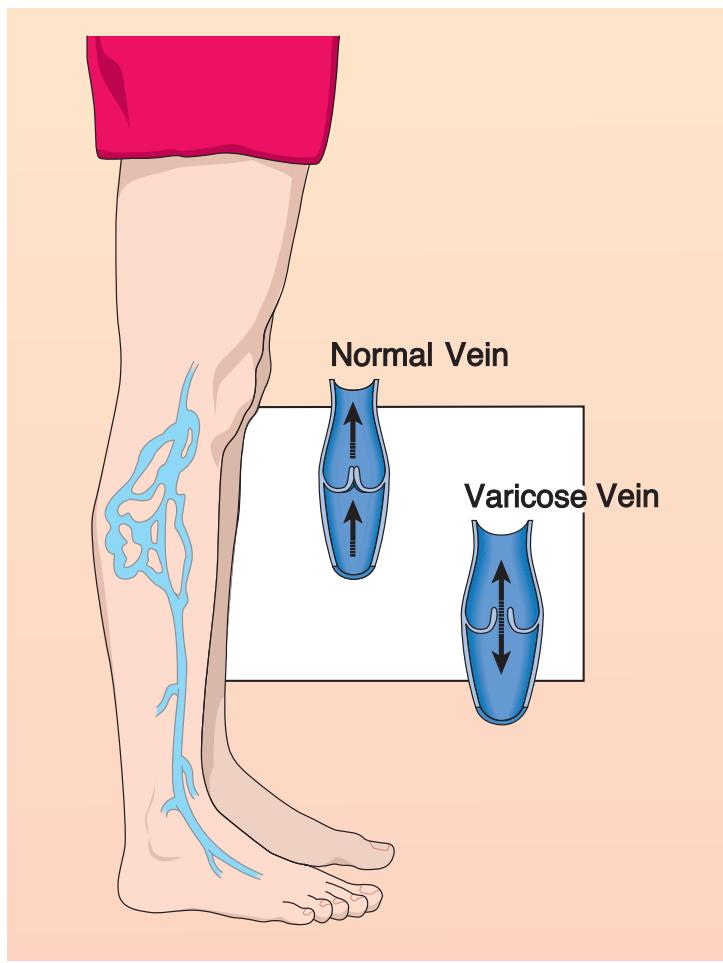
- Obesity.
- Pregnancy.
- Hormonal changes at menopause.
- Activities or hobbies that require standing or lifting heavy objects for long periods of time.
- A family history of varicose veins.
- Often wearing clothing that is tight around the upper thighs.
- Body positions that restrict lower leg blood flow for long periods of time, such as sitting in an airplane, especially in the economy class section, on a long flight. Also includes standing for long periods.
- Past vein diseases, such as thrombophlebitis, which is inflammation of a vein before a blood clot forms.

## TREATMENT

Medical treatment is not required for most varicose veins unless problems result. These include a deep vein blood clot or severe bleeding, which can be caused by an injury to the vein. Problems can occur without an injury, as well. An X-ray of the vein (venogram) or a special ultrasound can tell if there are any problems.

### Medical Treatment

- Surgery can remove all or part of the vein.
- Sclerotherapy, which uses a chemical injection into the vein, causing it to close up.
- Laser therapy, which causes the vein to fade away.





## TRIAGE QUESTIONS



Does it look like the varicose vein has broken open and is bleeding a lot under the skin? {Note: Apply direct pressure on the skin area over the varicose vein.}

**NO**      **YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Has the varicose vein become swollen, red, very tender or warm to the touch?

**NO**      **YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



With varicose veins, does a rash or do sores occur on the leg or ankle?

**NO**      **YES** ➡ **SEE DOCTOR**



Do varicose veins cause chronic, achy pain in the legs?

**NO**      **YES** ➡ **CALL DOCTOR**



Do you want to find out about cosmetic treatments for varicose veins?

**NO**      **YES** ➡ **CALL DOCTOR**



**USE SELF-CARE**



## SELF-CARE / PREVENTION

- Don't cross your legs when sitting.
- Exercise regularly. Walking is a good choice. It improves leg strength and vein strength.
- Maintain a healthy weight. Lose weight if you are overweight.
- Don't stand for long periods of time.
- If your job or hobby requires you to stand, shift your weight from one leg to the other every few minutes. Just wiggling your toes can help, too.
- Wear elastic compression stockings or support hose, as advised by your doctor.
- Don't wear clothing or undergarments that are tight or constrict your waist, groin or legs.
- Eat high-fiber foods, such as bran cereals, whole-grain breads, and beans, lentils, and fresh fruits and vegetables, to promote regularity. Constipation may be a factor in varicose veins.
- Elevate your legs when resting.
- Exercise your legs. From a sitting position, rotate your feet at the ankles, turning them first clockwise, then counterclockwise, using a circular motion. Next, extend your legs forward and point your toes to the ceiling then to the floor. Next, lift your feet off the floor and gently bend your legs back and forth at the knees.
- Get up and move about every 35 to 45 minutes when traveling by air when sitting for most of the day. Opt for an aisle seat, when available.
- Stop and take short walks at least every 45 minutes when taking long car rides.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

American Academy of Dermatology  
866-462-DERM (462-3376)  
[aad.org](http://aad.org)

American Vein & Lymphatic Society  
[myavls.org](http://myavls.org)