

Society for Vascular Nursing Patient Education: Varicose Veins

Varicose veins are widened, twisting, bulging, discolored veins that are very close to the surface of the skin. The widened and bulging veins are filled with blood and the pressure in these veins is high. This is because the valves in the veins that help the blood return to the heart are damaged. Varicose veins tend to be hereditary, most commonly occur in women, and worsen during pregnancy. Varicose veins may cause no symptoms or may cause a dull, heavy ache, itching, burning, fatigue, and cramping; particularly after standing for a long period of time. Some widened veins may be tender to touch and occasionally, ankle swelling may develop as the day progresses. Some persons are most concerned about the negative cosmetic appearance of varicose veins. Many women have small spider veins or web-like reddish-purple clusters of tiny veins on the legs, mainly the thighs. Rarely are spider veins a cause of pain.

DO:

- Maintain a normal weight.
- Avoid prolonged standing and sitting
- Regular exercise. Walking, swimming, or even chair exercises are great. Just move!
- Wear support stockings while exercising. This increases blood in the legs back to the heart.
- Elevate your feet above your heart while sleeping. Elevate foot of bed using bricks, a 2x4, or by placing a blanket or comforter under the mattress.
- Wear professionally made gradient support stockings that apply decreasing pressure on the leg from the ankle to knee.
- Put support stockings on before you get out of bed in the morning.
- Wear rubber dishwashing gloves to help you put your supports on.
- Watch carefully for folds in your support stockings. Knee length stocking should be just below the bend of the back of your knee by about 2 finger widths.
- Clip and file your toenails, to avoid snagging/running the stocking
- Change support stockings daily. Stockings need to be washed after each wearing to maintain the shape and compression.
- Avoid activities that are likely to cause injury to legs or feet like walking barefoot.
- Wear support all day, and remove in the evening.
- Make sure to wash your lower legs and feet regularly with mild soap and water.

- Be very careful if you shave your legs to avoid the thin walled veins that can be easily cut.
- Use moisturizing creams after washing legs; keep your legs clean and moisturized.
- Follow the manufacturer's instructions for laundering and care of your support stockings.
- Buy new stockings when you feel they are losing their support (feel less tight when you put them on).
- Get re-measured if your weight has changed by more than 10 lbs.
- To make putting on a support stocking easier, make sure you've been at rest for at least 20 minutes.
- Wear support stockings during pregnancy.

DON'T:

- Wear ACE bandages. Ace wraps do not provide proper compression.
- Wear tight girdles, pants, boots, or any leg coverings that have tight tops that might have a tourniquet effect.
- Cross your legs.
- Get measured for support stockings late in the day.
- Wear jewelry when donning compression stocking.
- Walk around without footwear to protect the stocking.
- Put on socks or leggings on first then cover it with the compression stocking.
- Wear your stockings to bed at night.
- Fold the top over, or pull it up on the knee.