



KAISER PERMANENTE®

Varicose Veins

Varicose veins are prominent veins that are close to the surface of the skin and become swollen with blood. Typically, varicose veins develop in the legs and occur most frequently in people who must stand or sit for long periods of time. After the veins have been repeatedly overloaded with blood (forced down by gravity), the walls of the veins tend to lose their elasticity and are no longer capable of exerting a firm resistance against the blood. As a result, the veins become over-stretched and incapable of holding up the blood. The tendency to develop varicose veins may be inherited and is more pronounced during pregnancy.

People who develop varicose veins usually complain about their appearance, but may also experience leg cramps at night, feelings of tiredness or a dull ache in the legs, and swollen ankles.

To help prevent varicose veins, regularly exercise your legs—such as by taking frequent walks. If your occupation requires long periods of sitting or standing, make a point of moving around often during working hours. Also avoid tight stockings or garters or any binding or clothing that is too tight.

Varicose veins may be relieved by a number of simple measures. Here are four suggestions:

- 1.) Lie flat with your feet raised slightly above your head several times throughout the day.
- 2.) Stimulate the flow of blood in the legs by exercising daily and taking warm baths. Even a brief walk will stimulate circulation.
- 3.) Wear special support stockings that are properly fitted. Support hose prevent the veins from becoming swollen and painful. They must be put on before standing, however, so you should put them on first thing in the morning.
- 4.) On the other hand, don't wear other pieces of clothing that fit tightly around the groin, thighs, or knees—such as garters, tight-fitting briefs or girdles, or tight pants.

If you're concerned about your varicose veins or if they're causing you pain, consult with your health care professional.

Certain cases of varicose veins that have gone beyond the stage where exercise and rest are helpful may be treated by injections of a hardening solution. A few hours after this treatment, the injected veins become hard, tender to the touch, and painful. However, the pain subsides within a few days and in about two months the varicose veins are diminished while the blood is channeled into other veins leading toward the heart. This treatment may require a number of injections and

doesn't always work on advanced cases of varicose veins because of high rates of recurrence.

In some people with severe and long-standing symptoms and many varicose veins, surgical treatment may be recommended. Surgical removal of varicose veins is possible because there are two complete systems of veins in each leg and varicose veins develop only in those closest to the surface. Therefore, the diseased veins can be removed because the deeper veins will remain after surgery.

The operation most often done for varicose veins is called a vein stripping and ligation. It is done under general anesthesia and usually requires a hospital stay of one to three days after surgery. Patients should expect to have some discomfort from the procedure, especially when walking, for at least two to three weeks. However, the operation is usually successful.



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The information presented here is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care. If you have persistent health problems or if you have additional questions, please consult with your doctor or other health care professional.

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