



FROM
YOUR DOCTOR

Caring for your varicose veins

Here are some tips that will help you care for your varicose veins. This might help you avoid surgery.

T H E D O S

Use compression stockings

Compression stockings are important for treating your varicose veins. Several different types are available, and their cost varies considerably. There are also several grades of compression. Your doctor will tell you which grade to buy.

- *Grade 1:* For mild varicose veins with minor symptoms
- *Grade 2:* For large varicose veins that cause significant symptoms
- *Grade 3:* For severe varicose vein problems and complications such as phlebitis, clots, ulcerations, or chronic swelling.

If you need prescription stockings, your doctor will order them. Nonprescription stockings can be purchased at medical supply stores.

Elevate your legs

You must elevate your legs at every opportunity. Raise them above the level of your heart—ideally, 2-3 times a day for 20 minutes at a time. If you are unable to elevate your legs during the day, elevate them for a half hour as soon as you get home from work. You can do this by using

pillows or by elevating the foot of the bed 2-4 inches.

Control your weight

It's important that you control your weight—especially if you are 20% or more over your ideal weight. If you've tried to lose weight on your own without success, consider enrolling in a weight-loss program or talk to your doctor.

Once you've obtained your desired weight, try not to regain the pounds you've lost. Weight loss decreases the pressure that a big stomach puts on the veins of your legs and abdomen.

Exercise

You should do some type of exercise if you don't want your condition to get worse. A walking program is the simplest and most effective way to improve the condition of what is called the "calf pump" in your legs. The calf pump returns blood back to your heart through your veins. A weak muscle doesn't pump as well as a strong one, and a regular walking program will make the pump work more efficiently.

T H E D O N ' T S

Avoid wearing high heels

Do not wear high heels unless you have no choice. Wearing heels to an occasional social event will not cause problems, but wearing them on a

regular basis almost eliminates the ability of your calf pump to function and can worsen your condition. It's best to wear short heels. If it's possible to wear athletic shoes to work, do



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so. Be sure to choose shoes that provide good support.

Avoid heated floors

If the heating at home or work is delivered from the floor close to where you usually sit, change your sitting location or cover the register. Although the heat may feel comfortable, it widens your veins, causing blood to pool in your legs.

Avoid whirlpool baths and hot tubs

Heated water increases the pooling of blood in your legs and feet and widens your veins.

Avoid tight pants and tight belts

When they are too tight, these garments can interfere with the blood return to your heart.

Don't sit or stand for too long at one time

When you're at work, walk around as much as possible. If you can't do that, do tip-toe exercises several times an hour while you're standing (see the illustration). If you're sitting

for long periods, do the following exercise: With your legs straight, move your feet up and down (see the illustration). Do this several times each hour.

If you're on a long plane trip, get up from your seat and walk the length of the plane from time to time. If you're taking a trip in the car, stop and walk around for five minutes or so every hour or two—especially if you're having leg pain. If you know you'll be sitting in a cramped area for several hours, wear compression stockings.

Stay out of the sun

Not only does the sun damage your skin, it also damages the elastic layer of your veins. The heat from the sun also causes varicose veins to widen and can cause skin color changes on your legs. Your feet and ankles are especially vulnerable. □

Warning signs

Call your doctor immediately if you notice a sudden onset of severe pain, redness, and hardness in your legs or feet. You may have a blood clot. This is a *rare* complication.



If you must stand in one place for a long time, raise and lower yourself on your toes several times an hour.



When you sit for a long time, extend your legs and move your feet up and down.