

PREGNANCY AND YOUR LEGS

One pregnant woman out of three suffers from heavy, aching legs and swollen feet and ankles.

For various reasons, varicose veins may develop during pregnancy and existing varicose veins tend to get worse. Wearing compression stockings during pregnancy prevents blood pooling in the veins and may slow development of varicose veins, inflammation (phlebitis) and blood clots, as well as relieving tired and aching legs.

50%

of people with
thread veins also
have venous
reflux

Q&As

Mark Whiteley, consultant vascular surgeon and Expert Beauty medical advisor answers your questions.

What causes varicose veins?

The veins in the legs work in harmony with the leg muscles to pump blood back from the foot to the heart. To stop the blood falling back down the veins when the muscles relax, all veins contain one-way valves. If these valves fail, the blood puts pressure on the capillaries in the skin around the lower leg, causing inflammation, swelling and aching. Over time, the inflammation may spread, leading to itching, skin discolouration and eventually an ulcer. The body tries to stop this damage by opening up side branches from the main veins to act as 'shock absorbers'. In doing this, these side branches get bigger and stretched - hence varicose veins.

Are varicose veins easy to diagnose?

Varicose veins are usually thought of as bulging veins on the legs that may appear blue or green if near

the surface. However over the last decade, we have learnt to recognise 'hidden varicose veins' - or in medical terms, 'venous reflux'. In hidden varicose veins there are no visible bulging veins, but instead there may be thread veins of the legs, aching or swelling of the lower legs or ankles, as well as itching or discolouration of the skin just below the calf muscle. A test called a venous duplex ultrasound scan is the only way to examine the flow of the blood in the veins to find out if the valves are faulty.

Is there any effective prevention?

As varicose veins are caused by valve failure, there is no simple preventative or topical treatment. Compression stockings can slow the deterioration - but not treat it nor prevent it. No complimentary therapies can stop the process of blood falling down abnormal veins by gravity. Anti-inflammatory drugs

or creams can reduce inflammation at the ankle.

What is the recommended treatment?

Successful treatment for varicose veins requires accurate identification of the abnormally functioning veins and their permanent destruction. New keyhole ablation techniques such as endovenous laser ablation (EVLA) and radiofrequency ablation (RFA) use heat to close the large underlying veins. Small veins are treated by foam sclerotherapy injections and bulging veins are removed through tiny incisions.

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For more information about Sigvaris medical compression hosiery, call 01264 326 666 or visit sigvaris.co.uk.