

# Don't Hide Your Legs This Summer

*"This summer, things will be different," says a happy FirstMed patient. "I'll be wearing shorts and skirts with bare legs, rather than trousers. Not because I've lost weight, but because I've had my varicose veins treated!"*

## What causes varicose veins?

In healthy leg veins, the valves prevent the blood from rushing back into your legs when the muscles relax. However, when the valves age or become faulty, the blood can fall back down the leg. Eventually, unsightly varicose veins are the result.

Vein treatment isn't just about aesthetics; there are health concerns, too. Varicose veins can make legs tired and achy; thread veins can develop and, worse, there's a risk of ulceration.

## How can I prevent them?

- + Exercise. Get your legs moving. Walking is a great way to encourage blood circulation in your legs.
- + Watch your weight, and your diet. Shedding excess pounds takes unnecessary pressure off your veins. Follow a low-salt, high-fiber diet to prevent the swelling that may result from water retention and constipation.
- + Watch what you wear. Avoid high heels. Low-heeled shoes work calf muscles more, which is better for your veins. Don't wear tight clothes around your waist, legs or groin.
- + Elevate your legs. To improve the circulation in your legs, take several short breaks daily to elevate your legs above the level of your heart.
- + Avoid long periods of sitting or standing. Make a point of changing your position frequently (at least every 30 minutes) to encourage blood flow.
- + Don't sit with your legs crossed. This position can increase circulation problems.

## How can I treat them?

- + Wear special stockings. These have a special elastic that provides pressure on the veins evenly from your feet to your groin.
- + Laser Treatment. This is a relatively new, minimally invasive method for treating varicose veins. A laser filament is inserted in the vein that works by closing it up from the inside.
- + Sclerotherapy. This is a process by which a medicine is injected into the vessels, causing them to shrink, and close down. After the chemical is injected, the patient has to walk around without pause for about 20 minutes, and the area is kept dry and under compression bandaging for 48 hours. Sclerotherapy is relatively free of complications, but a patient may have some bruising, itching and redness in the first 48 hours. Often, more than one appointment is necessary.
- + Surgery.- for advanced cases. Typically, the operation is performed in a single business day with no extended stay in a hospital. The wound heals in one or two weeks, but the area should be kept away from the sun for two or three months to minimize scarring.

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