

## Coventry & Warwickshire Vascular Unit



# Varicose vein surgery

Veins are the blood vessels that carry blood back to the heart. Varicose veins are swollen (dilated) veins visible below the skin's surface.

Smaller veins visible in the skin are sometimes called 'thread veins' or 'spider veins'. These are not the same as varicose veins.

### Before surgery

We may call you for a preadmission visit to make sure you are fit for surgery.

We may need to do a special scan of your leg before surgery. Your consultant will explain the scan to you.

Varicose vein surgery is usually carried out as a day case. But you may need to remain in hospital overnight if:

- you are having both legs operated on
- you are having repeat varicose vein surgery
- you have any medical problems

Your surgeon may suggest that you stop taking the contraceptive pill 1 month before surgery. This is to reduce the risk of a blood clot (thrombosis). You must consider other forms of contraception during this time.



## Patient Information

### **Coming into hospital**

We'll ask you to come in the day before or on the morning of surgery. Please bring any medicines you are taking with you.

The surgeon performing your surgery will mark the position of your veins. The anaesthetist will also see you before surgery.

### **During surgery**

Varicose vein surgery is usually carried out under a general anaesthetic.

The most common surgical procedure involves a cut in the groin over the top of the main varicose vein. This vein is then tied off where it meets the deeper veins. The main varicose vein on the inner aspect of the leg is then stripped out if possible.

Blood can still flow up the leg along deeper, unaffected veins. The cut in the groin is then closed with a stitch, usually hidden under the skin. The other veins, marked before surgery, are pulled out of tiny cuts. Some surgeons may use injections for this part of the surgery.

The tiny cuts are then closed with adhesive strips or stitches. Some other veins may be affected, especially one behind the knee.

The surgeon will place a dressing on the cut in your groin and bandage your leg up to the top of your thigh. The bandages put on during surgery must stay on your leg until your consultant advises you to remove them.

### **Going home**

For the first week, sit with your feet raised so that your heels are higher than your hips. This helps to drain the excess fluid from the tissues and assist healing.

Take a short walk 3 times a day (a few hundred yards will do, but more if you wish) to avoid your muscles and joints becoming stiff. This may be slightly uncomfortable.

## Patient Information

Some patients may have severe local twinges of pain that can continue for some months. In the first week after the operation, you may need to take a mild painkiller such as paracetamol to relieve discomfort.

When you remove the bandages, you may bath or shower. Wash the wounds with a non-perfumed product and pat dry – do not rub.

Cover the small incisions with Elastoplast strips and put on the stretch stocking. You may need to change the Elastoplast strips after a bath or shower for about 7 days.

Wear the stocking all day and night for the first week. During the second week, you may leave the stocking off at night, but you still need to wear the stocking during the day.

## What next?

Before you leave hospital, the ward nurse will explain possible arrangements to remove your skin staples or stitches.

Avoid driving for at least one week after the operation - in an emergency, your response time is slower. Before starting to drive again, you must be able to perform an emergency stop without pain. If in doubt, delay driving until you feel more confident.

## Complications

Sometimes, a little blood will ooze from the wounds during the first 24 to 48 hours after surgery. This usually stops on its own.

If necessary, raise the leg and press on the wound firmly for ten minutes. If bleeding continues after doing this twice, phone your GP or the ward.

Hard, tender lumps may appear near the scars or in the line of the removed veins - these can appear weeks after surgery. You do not need to worry about these lumps. However, see your GP if you also have excess swelling, redness and pain – you may have a wound infection.

## Patient Information

Rarely, there is numbness around the wound or ankle. This is unavoidable and is due to pulling on nerves during the operation. It usually settles after some weeks or months. The scars on your legs will continue to fade over many months.

### **Return to normal activity**

You can return to work when you feel well and comfortable. This is generally after about 7 to 10 days. If you've had both legs operated on, it'll be 3 to 4 weeks before you can carry out most activities.

If you have a job that involves a lot of standing and your varicose veins were severe, you may need up to 6 weeks off work. Your GP will advise you when you can return to work.

Not every visible vein will disappear after surgery.

In the future, more varicose veins may develop. To help prevent varicose veins in the future:

- do regular exercise
- avoid being overweight
- wear light support tights or stockings

If you smoke, you must stop completely. Smoking is likely to damage other veins, causing them to become varicosed.

Do not fly 6 weeks before or after surgery for long haul flights (more than 4 hours) and 4 weeks before or after surgery for short haul flights (less than 4 hours).

### **Review after surgery**

The consultant will usually see you in the outpatient clinic in the weeks after surgery. At this appointment, you can ask your consultant any questions or discuss your treatment.

## Patient Information

Contact your consultant's secretary if you have any questions or concerns in the meantime. Call 024 7696 4000 (hospital switchboard) and ask for your consultant's secretary.

## Useful contacts

Coventry Patient advice and Liaison Service (PALS): +44 (0) 800 0284203

South Warwickshire Hospital PALS: +44 (0)1926 600054

George Eliot Hospital PALS: +44 (0) 24 7686 5617

Coventry & Warwickshire County Vascular Unit

In conjunction with The Vascular Society of Great Britain and Ireland

[www.vascularsociety.org.uk](http://www.vascularsociety.org.uk)

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 5569 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke-free policy.

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### Document History

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