

This information is for patients who are having varicose vein surgery. It explains what happens, what to expect, and what risks there may be.

What are varicose veins?

They are veins (usually leg veins) that have become swollen, congested and often painful. They no longer function properly, if at all, and can be unsightly but varicose veins are not usually life threatening.

Why do they become varicose?

Blood vessels (arteries and veins) carry blood around the body. Veins carry blood back to the heart, and this blood is more like a leisurely stream being slowly pumped, pushed and squeezed along the veins by muscle activity, and prevented from sliding back by **cup shaped valves**. These valves fail in some people as they get older, so that the blood pools and the veins distend into lumpy knots.

If left untreated, in the long term they will get worse and can lead to more serious conditions such as phlebitis or leg ulcers.

What are the alternative treatments?

- Bandages or support stockings may help the symptoms.
- Surgery (removal of the veins). There are plenty of other veins that can take on the return of the blood, (mainly the deep veins of the leg).
- You may decide to do nothing and live with them.

You can discuss the different options for treatment with your specialist, before coming to a decision.

Surgery

This operation to remove varicose veins is usually performed under general anaesthetic in the Day Surgery Unit.

It is only possible to have one leg done at a time.

What preparation do you need?

- Please read your appointment letter and Day Surgery leaflet carefully for advice on the preparation you will need.

- It is important that you attend the pre-assessment (medical check-up) before your operation. If you fail to attend then your operation cannot go ahead.
- You may also have a duplex scan using ultrasound to give detailed pictures of your veins.
- If you have any questions about the operation please ask the nurse.

**You must not eat anything for at least 6 hours before the operation.
You may drink sips of water up until 2 hours before the operation.**

The day of your operation

Please check your appointment letter for the time of arrival at the Day Surgery Unit.

- Your surgeon will see you to explain the operation and ask you to sign a consent form to confirm that you understand the procedure and agree to go ahead with it.
- Your surgeon will mark the veins that are to be removed with a felt pen.
- Your anaesthetist will also come and see you to discuss your anaesthetic.

The operation

- You will have a general anaesthetic.
- The veins are removed by making a very small cut over each vein, which is then removed. It may be necessary to strip the veins out from the groin to the knee level.
- The small cuts are then closed with a stitch or steri-strips (paper strips).
- The leg is then bandaged firmly.
- The operation takes about 30 minutes.
- You will return to the Day Surgery ward to recover.

After the operation

- You will stay in the Day Surgery Unit for 3-4 hours following the operation.
- If you have any pain, please ask the nurse for some painkillers.
- You may have a snack and a drink as soon as you wish.
- The doctor will see you after the operation and advise you when you should remove your bandage; this can be any time from 1 – 7 days.

- If you have any stitches these will dissolve within 10 days, or if they are not dissolvable they will need to be removed by your GP in about a week.
- A letter will be sent to your GP and a copy given to you.

Going home

- Please make sure that a responsible person takes you home and stays with you for the first 24 hours.
- Please do not drink alcohol, drive or operate machinery (including kettles and cookers) for 24 hours to allow the anaesthetic to wear off.
- If you have any pain take your usual painkillers (following the instructions on the pack).
- Any paper strips over your wounds should stay in place for at least four days when you can remove them and have a bath.
- You will be given some support stockings to wear for 1 – 3 weeks after your bandage comes off, this helps prevent clots forming in the remaining leg veins.
- For the first week keep your leg raised on a stool when you are sitting.
- Remember, walking is good for the circulation.

- You will have some bruising on the leg, which can last for 3 – 4 weeks.
- Avoid standing for long periods and do not cross your legs until the wounds have healed.
- You should not drive for a week and then only after you can do an emergency stop safely.
- You can usually return to work within a week.

Are there any risks?

There are some risks associated with any procedure. This operation has few significant risks, they include:

Bleeding – if you experience obvious bleeding apply pressure over the area with a clean cloth for 15 minutes and raise the leg. If the bleeding continues then contact your GP or the Hospital Emergency Department.

Infection – if your wound sites get red, swollen and painful, you should contact your GP.

Numbness – occasionally a small area of numbness can occur which usually improves but rarely it can be permanent.

Recurrence – despite careful surgery, varicose veins can recur.

Please speak to your specialist doctor before your operation if you have any concerns about these risks.

Any further questions?

Please phone the Day Surgery Unit on 020 7288 5098/5097, Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm.
or phone NHS Direct on 0845 4647

Day Surgery Unit

Varicose vein surgery