



Risk Factors

- ▶ **Age:** Aging causes wear and tear on the valves in the veins that help control blood flow. Eventually, that wear causes the valves to allow some blood to flow back into the veins, where it collects.
- ▶ **Sex:** Women are more likely to develop the condition. Hormonal changes before a menstrual period or during pregnancy or menopause might be a factor because female hormones tend to relax vein walls. Hormone treatments, such as birth control pills, might increase the risk of varicose veins.
- ▶ **Pregnancy:** During pregnancy, the blood volume in the body increases. This change supports the growing baby but can also enlarge the veins in the legs.
- ▶ **Family History:** If other family members had varicose veins, there's a greater chance you will too.
- ▶ **Obesity:** Being overweight puts added pressure on veins.

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VARICOSE VEINS

What is Varicose Veins?

Varicose veins are twisted, enlarged veins. Any vein that is close to the skin's surface (superficial) can become varicose. Varicose veins most commonly affect the veins in the legs. That's because standing and walking increase the pressure in the veins of the lower body.

For many people, varicose veins and spider veins - a common, mild variation of varicose veins - are simply a cosmetic concern. For other people, varicose veins can cause aching pain and discomfort. Sometimes varicose veins lead to more-serious problems.



Symptoms

- ▶ Veins that are dark purple or blue.
- ▶ Veins that appear twisted and bulging, often appearing like cords on the legs.
- ▶ An achy or heavy feeling in the legs.
- ▶ Burning, throbbing, muscle cramping and swelling in the lower legs.
- ▶ Worsened pain after sitting or standing for a long time.
- ▶ Itching around one or more of the veins.
- ▶ Changes in skin color around a varicose vein.

Diagnose

Your health care provider will do a physical exam, including looking at your legs while you're standing to check for swelling.

To diagnose varicose veins, a health care provider might recommend a test called a venous Doppler ultrasound of the leg. A Doppler ultrasound is a noninvasive test that uses sound waves to look at blood flow through the valves in the veins.

In this test, a health care provider moves a small hand-held device (transducer), which is about the size of a bar of soap, against the skin over the body area being examined. The transducer transmits images of the veins in the legs to a monitor, which displays the results.

Treatment

Treatment for varicose veins may include self-care measures, compression stockings, and surgeries or procedures. Procedures to treat varicose veins are often done as an outpatient procedure, which means you usually go home on the same day.

Ask your insurer if varicose vein treatment is a covered expense. If varicose vein treatment is done only to improve the appearance of the legs (cosmetic reason), the cost might not be covered by insurance.

