

Ashamed to show your legs? There is a way out

One in four people suffers varicose veins which make them want to cover their legs at all times. Leading consultant vascular surgeon **Michael Gaunt** says you can walk with confidence again



For me this month marks the start of becoming more active as the evenings become lighter. Maybe there's not quite the promise of spring in the air but I'm positively ready to get more active and improve my wellbeing.

We all want to look good and how we care for our vascular health can play a major role in helping us achieve this. You may not initially associate varicose veins with your general health and wellbeing but when you consider that one person in four is affected in some way by varicose veins, it's clear that simple procedures can make a big difference to a patient's lifestyle.

Don't ignore symptoms

Many of us choose to ignore the onset of symptoms, preferring to 'cover-up and forget' during the winter months. Sometimes the symptoms develop very slowly over years and you may be unaware that the changes in your legs are due to varicose veins, especially as they may not be particularly prominent or visible in some people.

Symptoms of varicose veins can include:

- Aching, tired or heavy feeling in your legs
- Painful throbbing, muscle cramping and swelling in your lower legs
- Worsened pain after sitting or standing for a long time
- Restless legs, especially at night
- Persistent leg itching
- Bleeding from varicose veins
- Ulceration
- Skin discolouration around the ankles

Simple self help

You may find mild symptoms are helped by raising your legs, by wearing support stockings or

regular movement. A healthy lifestyle, eating well and finding ways to stay active are important and even more so if you have varicose veins, as weight gain can make symptoms seem worse.

Simple conservative measures such as these may offer some relief to symptoms but will not treat the underlying cause - the problematic varicose veins.

Getting active and improving circulation

You don't have to run a marathon to improve your circulation, little changes like taking regular breaks if sitting at a desk all day, will help, and may temporarily reduce varicose vein symptoms. Step counters and fitness trackers that record the number of steps you make in a day are perfect for maintaining and highlighting your daily activity helping you boost your circulation.

Poor circulation occurs when the blood doesn't flow freely through the body. Blood flow naturally improves with the onset of activity, it needn't be high impact but it does need to be consistent and frequent.

Varicose veins impair circulation. That's why they often appear raised or bobbly. Instead of all the blood from the legs returning to the heart, a proportion of blood refluxes back down the superficial veins impairing the venous circulation of the leg and giving rise to the symptoms of aching, swelling and night cramps.

Long term complications

The best way to avoid complications from veins is to treat them early and not ignore them. In the developing stages, varicose veins and thread veins



Picture: THINKSTOCK

may be primarily a cosmetic problem. However, if ignored, the condition can deteriorate and a variety of complications can occur such as leg swelling, pigmentation of the skin around the ankles and leg ulcers.

Circulation is key to a healthy lifestyle. If the venous circulation is impaired for a long time the delivery of oxygen to the skin around the leg and ankle is decreased and toxins accumulate. This can develop increased venous pressure resulting in venous ulcers.

Occasionally, veins can burst, causing bleeding, or the blood within the veins can clot, leading to the painful condition of phlebitis or even deep vein thrombosis. People who use air travel for work or holidays may be at increased risk, particularly if those flights are long haul.

'You'll feel more positive about your legs and your circulation will improve'

What are the benefits of varicose vein treatment?

You'll feel more positive about your legs, the unsightly raised, bobbly varicose veins will be removed, alleviating your symptoms. Your circulation will improve and it should also help prevent further complications that varicose veins may cause.

You'll be glad to hear that modern treatments are minimally invasive and may be performed under local anaesthetic as a walk-in, walk-out procedure. Having treated over 5,000 patients

using the minimally invasive Endovenous Laser and ClariVein techniques, I am one of the most experienced surgeons in the UK. Also available is VeinWave treatment for unsightly facial thread veins and spider veins.

For more information on varicose veins and treatments visit: www.michaelgaunt.com

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