

# 9 Things You Need To Know About Varicose And Spider Veins

We've got some good news, and some bad news.



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As spring kicks into high gear and summer isn't far behind, most women feel the pressure to have picture-perfect legs for baring in shorts and skirts. For some, the only thing worse than realizing you missed a few hairs around your knee is sporting deeply colored, noticeable veins. Varicose veins, as they're most commonly known, affect more than 80 million adult Americans, according to *Say Goodbye to Varicose and Spider Veins Now!* by Greg Martin, MD. Here's some info that may ease your mind.

**1. Crossing your legs doesn't cause varicose veins.** Neither does wearing high heels. "These are just old wives' tales," says Luis Navarro, MD, founder and medical director of The Vein Treatment Center in New York City. The pooling of blood is actually more commonly caused by prolonged standing and/or sitting. Other notable causes: "obesity, smoking, lack of exercise and hormonal birth control," according to Dr. Navarro.

**2. They're not just a cosmetic problem.** Probably the most common misconception about varicose veins is that people only get them treated because they're, well, vain. Though experts agree that varicose veins are most often not a health issue, they shouldn't be ignored. "Varicose veins cause fatigue of the legs, swelling and general discomfort. They can also be a warning of long-term health risks including: deep vein thrombosis, blood clots, poor circulation and leg swelling," says Dr. Navarro.

So when should you see a doctor? "If your legs feel heavy or sore at the end of the day or with physical activity," says Lindsey Bordone, MD, a board-certified dermatologist in the department of dermatology at Columbia University Medical Center in New York City.

**3. It's definitely genetic,** but don't be too quick to blame one parent or the other. "You can inherit the tendencies from either, or both sides of the family, and it can even skip a generation," explains Dr. Martin.

**4. Varicose veins and spider veins aren't the same thing.**

Spider veins are:

- small, thin blue blood vessels that can be seen under the skin
- usually harmless
- can be a symptom of poor circulation and varicose vein formation

Varicose veins are:

- stretched-out veins where blood has pooled
- thick, "ropey" and protrude out of legs
- occur when one-way valves don't work properly

And as Garth Rosenberg, MD, a vascular surgeon for Capitol Vein and Laser Center in Frederick, MD, points out, "It's not uncommon to have varicose and spider veins in one leg."

**5. Men have them, too.** While experts agree that 70 to 80% of patients treated for varicose veins are women, Dr. Rosenberg confirms that men also suffer from venous diseases, even if they're less likely to seek treatment.

**6. But pregnancy can bring about varicose veins.** Dr. Martin details in his book that pregnancy causes "increased pressure against the inferior vena cava, the main vein that drains blood from the lower half of the body. In certain body positions, the fetus can practically block the flow of blood." Plus, extra production of hormones during pregnancy "causes the smooth muscle of the veins to relax, increasing both their storage capacity and their propensity to dilate. This in turn increases the risk of varicose and spider veins." However, as Dr. Bordone explains, "anything that increases pressure in your abdomen can lead to varicose veins," including "excess fat." Which brings us to our next point...

**7. Exercise is the best way to prevent and maintain vein issues,** so add this to your list of reasons to sneak in a workout. "The more you're active and healthy the better," explains Dr. Rosenberg, whose favorite circulation-boosting activities include swimming and climbing stairs. Meanwhile, Dr. Martin swears by a classic: walking. And also this anywhere, anytime exercise: toe raises. "Throughout the day, strengthen and exercise your calf muscles by simply raising yourself up on the balls of your feet and then lowering yourself back down," he writes in his book.

**8. There's no proven way to reduce the appearance** (aside from professional treatment), though some patients use makeup to cover up their prominent veins. But you *can* ease the painful symptoms. Here are Dr. Navarro's and Dr. Martin's top three suggestions:

- *Compression stockings or pantyhose:* available in knee-high, thigh-high and waist-high sizes. "You can be fitted for these at surgical supply stores," says Dr. Bordone
- *Horse Chestnut Seed Extract:* available [online](#), it helps decrease vein dilation
- *Witch Hazel:* available at drug stores, it creates a "hose effect with the little film of chemical to squeeze the skin and relieve pain," says Dr. Martin

**9. Treatment is better than ever,** so that's good news. According to all four experts, treatment today is quite advanced. "There are no scars, no cutting—very minimal recovery. We do it in an office setting, we stay away from the hospital and we stay away from the need for general anesthesia," explains Dr. Martin.

According to Dr. Rosenberg, most insurance companies cover the cost of treatment, which Dr. Martin notes in his book can range from \$600 to \$2,100 in total.