

The Best Ways to Treat Varicose Veins

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Tired of uncomfortable, unsightly varicose veins? Learn about the available treatments to identify the best one for you.



Considered a cosmetic issue, varicose veins may cause health complications over time.

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Key Takeaways

Varicose veins can be unsightly and uncomfortable, but they are treatable.

Not treating varicose veins can lead to complications such as **ulcers** and poor circulation.

The most common methods of varicose vein treatment are non-invasive.

Swollen, twisted, and enlarged veins seen under the skin, known as varicose veins, can cause achiness as well as embarrassment. "Varicose veins develop due to a weakening of vein valves and vein walls," explains Luis Navarro, MD, director of the [Vein Treatment Center](#) in New York City. "The weakening of the valves causes the blood to pool, stretching the vein and causing it to protrude through the skin."

Varicose veins usually start as a cosmetic issue, "but they may cause health complications over time, including bleeding, ulcers, phlebitis, and poor circulation," Dr. Navarro says.

Luckily, there are remedies. "Varicose vein treatment depends on the severity of the problem and whether the issue originates in the saphenous vein [the main vein trunk] or the veins that branch off of that trunk," says [Antonios Gasparis, MD](#), a vascular surgeon and director of the Stony Brook Vein Center at Stony Brook Medicine on Long Island, New York. "When people are at the point where they have heaviness and discomfort in their legs, it's usually due to an abnormality in both the branches and the trunk."

Treating Varicose Veins

You can find out how severe your varicose veins are by discussing results of an ultrasound with your physician. Together, you'll find the best treatment options for your individual case. These may include:

Sclerotherapy: This is a painless saline injection treatment that collapses the vein so that it can then be reabsorbed back into the bloodstream. Navarro says he generally recommends sclerotherapy for small to medium varicose veins. Types of sclerotherapy for varicose vein treatment include:

- laser-assisted — the least invasive and most advanced
- foam sclerotherapy — for larger, more difficult-to-treat veins
- and ultrasound-guided sclerotherapy — for large, deep veins that once required surgical treatment

The advantage of [sclerotherapy](#) is that it can eliminate varicose veins with no pain or downtime, Navarro says. The disadvantage is that the technique may not work for larger, more extensive varicose veins. You may also have to go back for follow-up treatments in order for your veins to completely disappear.

Phlebectomy: Also called vein "stripping," this is a surgical procedure during which the surgeon makes small cuts near the damaged vein and removes the entire vein. Doctors sometimes do phlebectomy together with other procedures, such as ablation (see below).

The main advantage of phlebectomy is that it's a permanent treatment because the affected vein is totally removed, Dr. Gasparis says. But like any surgical procedure, it comes with some risks and requires more recovery time than less invasive methods of varicose vein treatment.

Thermal ablation (also called radiofrequency ablation): "Thermal ablation, which has been around for about a decade, involves using laser or radio frequency energy to heat the inside of the vein," Gasparis explains. "This destroys the vein wall, the vein shrinks, and the body absorbs it over time." [Thermal ablation](#) tends to work well as a varicose vein treatment, he says, but it can cause a little bruising and discomfort for the first week or so — "and because we heat the vein to 200 degrees to destroy it, we need to numb the area around it with an anesthetic, which can cause some discomfort as well."

Veins usually become less visible within one to two weeks. The procedure requires some local anesthesia, but most people have little pain after the procedure and can return to their normal activities the next day.

Non-thermal ablation: Two similar non-thermal techniques were recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Gasparis notes. The first, [Varithna](#), which the FDA approved in November 2013, uses a medicated foam. "It's basically the same as thermal ablation, but instead of heat, we use a potent drug that destroys the vein more permanently," Gasparis says. The second non-thermal ablation treatment for varicose veins, called the VenaSeal system, which received [FDA approval in February 2015](#), uses a glue to shut off the vein, Gasparis says.

So far, these procedures seem to work well for varicose vein treatment, he says. But because they are so new, they aren't time-tested to see if they keep varicose veins under control long term.

The Bottom Line

If you're considering varicose vein treatment, make sure you go to someone who has experience doing the procedure you choose. Gasparis says that doctors of all types, including primary care physicians, cardiologists, and OB/GYNs, are doing varicose vein treatment these days. He advises you to look online for a physician or facility accredited by the [Intersocietal Accreditation Commission](#).