

Vanishing Act

LHJ staffer Mandy Hendrix reveals what it's like to have varicose vein surgery.

By Mandy Hendrix

At first, I dismissed the dark, bumpy spot on the back of my knee as just a bruise. It felt tender whenever I wore my skinny jeans, and when it hadn't healed after a few months, I made an appointment with Luis Navarro, MD, director of the Vein Treatment Center in New York City. Dr. Navarro, whose official specialty is called phlebology, confirmed it: A large vein in my leg -- the greater saphenous vein (GSV) -- had become faulty, allowing blood to flow backwards. This caused a cluster of veins in the back of my knee to enlarge into a twisted, bulging mess. Dr. Navarro told me that around 20 percent of the population eventually gets varicose veins; mine just happened earlier because of genetics (yup, my mom has the same problem).

He recommended endolaser therapy to seal the damaged vein, which would redirect the blood through healthier veins. Although it wasn't yet problematic, my varicose vein would get bigger, more painful, and could even cause skin infections. I would also need a mini-phlebectomy, which meant Dr. Navarro would make tiny incisions at the back of my knee to remove the ropey, twisted veins. (Together, both procedures average \$3,000 to \$5,000 and are typically covered by insurance.) The day of the surgery, Dr. Navarro's associate swabbed a numbing cream from my thigh to my ankle and he gave me local anesthesia before the 45-minute procedure. Afterward, I was given strict instructions to wear a compression stocking for a week to get the blood flowing toward my heart.

I felt pretty good the first 48 hours after the surgery but the next five days weren't exactly pain-free, and I had to remind myself to take it slow. Four weeks later, I still have light bruising and some faint scars. Was it worth it? Definitely. I'm happy I dealt with my varicose vein sooner rather than later. Best of all, I feel confident wearing a skirt and comfortable in my skinny jeans.



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