

Varicose vein risk in pregnancy



PARENTAL GUIDANCE

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Why do pregnant women tend to get varicose veins in the legs, and what can they do to prevent or minimize them?

Three factors contribute to the formation of varicose veins in pregnant women, says Dr. Luis Navarro, a surgeon, phlebologist and director of the Vein Treatment Center in Manhattan.

First, there's an increase in female hormones, which can weaken the vein walls, he says. Second, there's a greater volume of blood circulating through the body because of the need to also nourish the fetus. And third, the expanding uterus presses on the veins in the belly, making it harder for the veins in the legs to push the blood back up to the heart. The blood then pools in some leg and ankle veins, which makes them bulge and become unsightly and uncomfortable, Navarro says.

To help prevent varicose veins from forming, pregnant women should consider wearing maternity compression stockings from early in the pregnancy and on, do exercises that strengthen their leg muscles, stand up and walk every hour, and put their legs up whenever they can, Navarro says.

"Six weeks after delivery, many of them go back to normal," Navarro says of the varicose veins. But they tend to get worse every subsequent pregnancy, he says. And some of them may remain permanently.

Chronic varicose veins cause problems ranging from solely cosmetic — women don't like how they look — to discomfort to more severe problems such as blood clots, Navarro says.

Women can seek treatment to have the veins corrected through injections, he says.